How
To Live
With

diveRSity

in the local church

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Diversity! Is it a curse or a blessing? That is a question many pastors are asking themselves. Diversity in this day and age is a stark reality, with pluralism of race, ethnic background, values and lifestyle being more and more a factor in many local church memberships.[1] The issue of plurality, its impact and appropriateness, has been critical in both of my pastorates. This is due in part to the fact that my denomination, Presbyterian, is noted for its inclusive nature. Both congregations I have served are extremely diverse in their composition. They contain theological liberals and conservatives; people with college and graduate educations and people who never went beyond grade school; people from the political right and the political left; people who are affluent and some who are poor.

I have found that such diversity creates a great deal of ferment. Sometimes growth and excitement emerge out of the ferment as diverse people work, study and worship together. But sometimes anxiety, tension, division, and a lack of growth seem to be the only products.

Diversity seems to have a "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" kind of personality. On the one hand, it appears to be a destructive force leaving devastation in its wake. A few years ago a headline in *A.D.*, a periodical published by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States, read, "40 Churches Leave UPC Family." The article began this way:

> A pall of sadness spread over the United Presbyterian Church as spring and summer of 1980 advanced and passed. The sadness arose because a number of ministers, sessions and congrega-

tions, in every part of the nation but New England and the
South, voted to withdraw from the United Presbyterian family.

Causes of the withdrawals are diverse. In many cases congrega-
tional decisions to leave were precipitated by the determination of
Presbyteries and the General Assembly that local churches must
elect women to offices, including offices that involve ordination.[2]
Such episodes convince us that diversity may well produce trou-
blesome results. Dr. Jekyll lives.
On the other hand, diversity seems to be an important part of
what it means to be the church. And so there are voices present
which affirm the desirability, and even the necessity of this same
plurality. A Presbyterian manual, published the same year as the ar-
ticle previously mentioned, enthusiastically proclaims:

A Presbyterian Church preserves its internal unity in the midst
of an obvious pluralism, even in the midst of Presbyterian plu-
ralism. In other words, the Spirit of the Christian faith is one of
universal recognition of other cultures, political stances, theolog-
ical outlooks. It is in the midst of this reality that a given Presby-
terian congregation exists and functions.[3]

Welcome Mr. Hyde.
I have faced both the good and bad sides of diversity in my own
ministry. In one instance I was able to use the economic diversity of
one congregation as a teaching tool in adult education. The adult
class was studying a passage in which poverty appeared to be ex-
tolled (Luke 6:20). I knew that a number of people in the group
were extremely poor. I asked them to tell us how their poverty in-
fluenced their relationship with God and they were able to tell the
relatively affluent remainder of the class how their poverty helped
them to learn how to trust God and depend on Him. In this case
diversity opened some doors and brought fresh understanding.
In another instance the results were not as gratifying. I had in
one church an elder who quite simply spoke a different theological
language. As a result I had difficulty understanding him and he, me.
To make matters worse, my way of putting things often upset him
since he had been taught to distrust people who spoke the way I
did. He in turn used phrases that made me feel terribly uncomforta-
ble because of some previous experiences. The result was an ever-
increasing relational gap, and the subsequent departure of this per-
son from my congregation.

In the face of this tension I would like to return to my beginning assumption. Like it or not, diversity does exist. If we are realistic we have to admit that the local pastor usually does not have much choice. Diversity is a given and the pastor must learn to live with it. The problem is that it can be either good or bad, creative or destructive. Thus the real question facing most pastors is not "Will I allow diversity?" The real question is "What will I do with what I have? How can I control the impact diversity has upon the congregation I serve?"

That question has not been asked enough. My conversations with other pastors have convinced me that all too often there is no clear understanding of diversity, and no conscious, deliberate strategy for dealing with it. Most pastors join me in feeling as if they are "working in the dark" as they try to hold the often tattered fabric of their congregations together.

What we need to discover are ways to bring out the best in diversity, and ways to keep its negative side from rearing its ugly head. I believe such management is possible. There are certain things church leaders can do which will make a tremendous difference in the way diversity affects their congregations. In this book I will be putting forth some of the strategies I have developed in my own efforts to handle pluralism in the congregations I have served. The list of strategies I offer will certainly not be exhaustive, but I hope it will be a beginning, and will help you in your efforts to hold it all together in the local church.

I will present the strategies in several general groupings. First, we will look at those strategies which involve developing a solid foundation on which to build a diverse community of faith. Second, we will look at those strategies which focus on the development of a congregational identity. Third, we will examine those strategies which involve relational issues. Finally, we will look at some very practical concerns involving such factors as infrastructure and program development.

A final note: I have great hope for the church today. In spite of all the pressures which assail it, both from without and from within, I believe the church in our time has more potential for influencing its world than it has ever had before. But I also believe that diversity is a key factor in determining whether that potential ever becomes reality. Diversity can either help or hinder, and which it does depends on us, to a large degree. If we can manage diversity well then we can legitimately hope for growth, vitality, and effectiveness. If we do not, then we are inviting schism, disintegration, and thus a powerless future. I would hope that with eyes wide open we might

learn how to deal with the powerful reality that is pluralism. That we would control it, rather than allow it to control us, and that we would thus assure the church's future as a significant power in our world.

Church history is strewn with institutions that began well, but bogged down into familiar patterns from the past. I would hate to see the church left out of the adventure of God's future by not choosing to manage its diversity so that it was both enriching and unifying.[4]

CHAPTER II

Understanding—
A Missing Element

It would be presumptuous to discuss strategies for dealing with diversity without first taking a look at diversity itself, for we cannot adequately deal with something we do not understand. There is a story about a book collector who ran into an unbookish acquaintance who soon revealed that old books didn't mean anything to him. In fact, he observed, he had just thrown away a big old Bible which had been packed away for many generations in the attic of his ancestral home. He was describing it and said, "Somebody named Guten-something had printed it." The bibliophile gasped. "Not Gutenberg. You idiot! You've just thrown away one of the first books ever printed. A copy sold recently for over a million dollars." But the other man was unmoved. He responded, "This copy would never have been worth that much. Some fellow named Martin Luther had scribbled notes all through it!"

You cannot adequately deal with what you do not understand. If we would work with diversity, we must try first to understand it.

The Kinds of Diversity

It is assumed that there is diversity in almost any local congregation. But the question remains. "What kind of diversity appears to be significant?" This is a large question which cannot be easily or simply answered, for the possible combinations of elements seem endless. Yet certain types of pluralism appear to be of primary importance.

"*Life Setting Pluralities.*" Some of these pluralities involve the "life settings" of the individuals. Of particular significance are so-

cial/economic class, place in the life cycle (age), and education
level.

Social/Economic: It is very difficult for people to feel comforta-
ble with a wide range of social/economic levels. A poor person, for
example, often feels awkward in the midst of a group of affluent
people. Just recently in my own church a young woman came into
my office after a special program to which the public had been in-
vited. She was very nervous and asked if she could talk with me. I
assured her that she was more than welcome to talk and so our
conversation began. She told me how much she had appreciated
our program and how much it had helped her. Then she asked me
an incredible question: "Can I come to your church?" "Of course," I
answered, "anyone is welcome." "I wasn't sure," she responded.
"Someone told me that this was a rich church and that poor people
couldn't come here." Of course an affluent church would never say
to a poor person, "You aren't welcome." Yet exclusion will happen
unless a great deal of effort is made to make sure that person is
included. Simple factors such as dress and the nature of the
church's building can say to a person, "You don't belong here."
How can a person worship comfortably in a building that is far
nicer than his/her own home? Or worship in jeans while sur-
rounded by three-piece suits? Of course the reverse can also be
true. A church made up primarily of low-income families may well,
by its very nature, exclude affluent families.

Life Cycle: A diversity in age can also be significant. Young peo-
ple are different from older people. They often have different con-
cerns, different likes, different values, and different beliefs. Much
diversity is not due simply to age. In fact young and old share many
things in common, such as concerns about family, mates, jobs, and
values. But what people have experienced, and the time when they
were raised, affect them tremendously. A person raised during the
privation of the 1930s sees life differently than a person raised dur-
ing the relatively affluent 1950s and 1960s. A person who went
through the Vietnam experience sees life differently from a person
who grew up after that event. What is important to this generation
is different from what was important to the last. The last generation,
for example, was not terribly concerned with "packaging." Twenty
or thirty years ago how the church building looked was not nearly
as important as whether it was functional. Today's young people are
concerned with how a church building looks. They want an attrac-
tive place to worship, and seem almost as concerned with the aes-
thetics of the bathroom as they are the beauty of the sanctuary. It is
a new world out there, and the changes can confuse and divide.

Education: Certainly educational level can be seen as extremely critical. People with a higher level of education are not better than those with a lower level of education, but they are certainly different. They tend to read more, are often more verbal, and in many cases have very different concerns. Expectations about the church are often shaped by education. Education affects the types of sermons appreciated, the kinds of classes desired, and the style of worship enjoyed.

"Pluralities Involving Personality." Another major area of focus involves the general personality of the individuals participating in the life of the church. People are different, and those differences have a tremendous impact on the church.

Neuro-Linguistics: Recent studies in the field of neuro-linguistics have shown us just how important personality factors can be. Neuro-linguistics is the study of the language of the nervous system. The concept of neuro-linguistics assumes that people receive and interpret messages in three different modes; the audio mode, the visual mode, and the kinesthetic mode. While each person has all three modes present in them, each tends to respond to the world, and to other people, through one dominant mode.

Audio dominant people tend to be word and concept oriented. They like to listen to words, and think about concepts. They like dealing with details and facts, and usually stay away from less objective realities, such as feelings. They do not like emotions and have a great deal of difficulty with emotional people.

People who function in the visual mode are concerned with the visual aspects of reality. For them what is important is how things look. They tend to visualize everything and so even when they read words, they develop a mental picture in their minds. Their primary source of stimulation is visual in nature and comes from such sources as art and nature.

Kinesthetics tend to be emotional in orientation. This person is usually in touch with his/her emotions and expresses them freely. This person likes feelings and actively seeks emotional stimulation.

We can see the presence of these various modes on a number of levels. Languages, for example, can be either audio, visual, or kinesthetic dominant. German with its tremendous detail is audio, Chinese with its strong imagery is visual, and French and Italian with their expressive capabilities are kinesthetic.

Individual congregations also tend to display one dominance or another. Some churches, such as many Presbyterian congregations, tend to be audio dominant. These churches focus on ideas and words. They place a heavy emphasis on teaching, and worship is

centered around the exposition of the Word of God. Other congregations are visual. These churches tend to be liturgical in nature and are marked by the use of banners, candles, processions, vestments and the like. Many Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran congregations fall into this category. The nature of the building is also likely to be of primary importance, a fact which explains the creative architecture often visible in these traditions' church buildings. Finally, some churches are kinesthetic in nature. These churches find feelings very important and thus tend to be very relational. Many opportunities are provided for personal interaction. Even the worship experiences tend to be relational in nature and are designed to stimulate an emotional response in those present. Most Pentecostal churches fit into this category.

When an individual congregation has more than one of these modes present in a significant way this pluralism becomes very important. A church which has a large number of audio-dominant people and a large number of kinesthetic dominant people is bound to experience some real tension, for these two groups will expect very different things from worship, study, and the church in general. One group will demand emotional stimulation, the other knowledge. One group will look for a great deal of personal sharing, the other group will want to exchange ideas.

It is important that we not underestimate the power of the personality. If we neglect the study of the people who make up our congregations we may find ourselves unable to respond effectively to the diversity which may be present.

"*Religious Pluralism*": Many of the most powerful kinds of pluralisms fall under the general heading of "religious pluralism." Important here are such things as theological orientation, church background, goals and focus.

Theological Orientation: Certainly one must take seriously any diversity in the area of theological orientation. Glock and Stark in their book *Religion and Society in Tension* suggest that there are four great theological camps:[1] the liberals, the moderates, the conservatives, and the fundamentalists. I would add yet a fifth camp, the Pentecostals. Each of these camps is unique, having distinct histories, traditions, styles, beliefs and even distinct languages. Due to the profound differences between them, the presence of more than two of these camps in a congregation is bound to be significant.

Church Focus: There are many dimensions to the religious experience. Faith in God is intellectual, behavioral, ideological, ritualistic and experiential. All of these dimensions together create a wholistic religious experience. The intellectual dimension deals

with knowledge. When one takes the intellectual dimension seriously one learns the basic tenets of the faith and becomes familiar with its sacred writings. The behavioral dimension deals with such elements as lifestyle and attitude. It involves shaping one's life according to the prescriptions of one's faith. The ideological dimension concentrates the correct interpretation of the content. The ritual dimension involves the specifically religious practices expected of those who adhere to the faith and includes practices such as communion and baptism. The experiential dimension recognizes the need for a personal religious experience. It involves direct, personal involvement with God and the subsequent engagement of the whole self in the practice of faith.

Ideally each church and each believer takes seriously all of these various dimensions. In reality churches and believers tend to concentrate their focus on certain dimensions to the exclusion of the others. A church may be heavily experiential in orientation and neglect almost entirely the intellectual dimension. Or one may be heavily ritualistic, concentrating on the sacraments, and neglect the behavioral dimension. If there is a plurality of focus, that plurality is significant.

Church Background: The church background of congregation members can have a profound effect on a particular fellowship of faith, for as human beings we are shaped by our origins. Just as who we are as individuals is determined to a great degree by our families of origin, so our religious identity is formed by our religious "family of origin." This shaping can work one of two ways. Either we feel good about our early experience and seek to duplicate it, or we are repelled by our early experience and seek to avoid repetition.

If, in a particular congregation, a large number of people come from varied backgrounds there is the potential for a disruptive pluralism. Various people will be seeking to develop worship experiences which "feel like home." But home for each of them may be very different in nature. People will be looking for educational experiences just like the ones they enjoyed as children or youth. But for one person that will mean a heavy emphasis upon Bible stories and Scripture memorization, and for another it will mean discussion or enjoyable activities. Or, to approach the matter from a different angle, one person may be repelled by an event because it brings back painful memories while another is ecstatic about the same event because it stimulates warm memories. Differences in church background can have a powerful influence indeed.

In mentioning these various pluralities I am only scratching the

surface of this important subject. Many other kinds of diversity can radically affect a local church. Let me simply say that identifying the various kinds of diversity present in a local church is one of the most important tasks a person can do. There is a tremendous need to know what kinds of diversity are possible, and to discover which are present in a local church (Lyle Schaller has provided some excellent tools for this task in his book *Looking in the Mirror*).

The Negative Side of Diversity

It is important not only to understand the diversity present in a local church, but also that diversity's potential for being harmful. There is clearly a negative side to diversity as it is present in a human community and we must know what can go wrong when we bring dissimilar or heterogeneous types together.

First, there is a strong impact upon the interaction between members of the group. This rises out of the fact that most people tend to group together and interact with others who are similar to them. They feel safe when they are surrounded by the familiar, and comfortable enough to interact freely. But remove the similarity and what happens? Discomfort sets in, barriers are raised, and interaction is hampered. As one author notes:

> A large group of studies indicate that like people group together. Unlike ones do not. Heterogeneity often reduces potential interaction to zero. . . .[2]

The conclusion is clear. The more diversity, the less interaction. Since interaction is an essential part of church life, diversity must be seen from this perspective as detrimental.

The lack of interaction due to heterogeneity creates some secondary problems. Not only is interaction hampered, but so is integration. It is very difficult to assimilate people into a group if they are not like the core people in that group. The fact is that assimilation or integration is a major problem for many churches. They have tremendous difficulty helping even those who are similar to the core break down the social barriers and become an integral part of the group, and find it almost impossible to help people who are dissimilar discover the necessary community. And what happens to a fragile community of homogeneous people when people who

are quite different enter its midst? These are tough questions which must be addressed seriously.

This leads to yet another element influenced negatively by diversity—attractiveness. The presence of diversity diminishes the attractiveness of a group both to those outside the group and to those inside. The premise is that a group is attractive if it has clear goals and can offer people certain rewards. When diversity is present it is very difficult to establish clear goals. And when pluralism is too obvious one of the primary rewards of group participation disappears—the joy of being a part of a group that is like oneself. Homogeneity encourages intimacy and community; heterogeneity does not.

It should be noted at this point that such factors as attractiveness, interaction, and integration have a profound effect upon the workings of a particular group. For example, a group that has good interaction, is able to assimilate members well, and is thus attractive, will tend to be an effective group. It will be a self-perpetuating group, with all of these positive factors working together to make the group more secure, more attractive, and more able to assimilate. The opposite is also true. A group that is not attractive, does not have good interaction, and which cannot assimilate will tend to be ineffective. And this negative dynamic too will be self-perpetuating. The group which is hindered in this way will become less and less effective as time goes by.

What we find is that diversity often is the catalyst which creates a terrible downward movement in the life of a community. That movement can be charted as follows:

1. An issue is presented.
2. The issue disrupts the equilibrium of community relations.
3. Previously suppressed issues come to the surface.
4. More and more of the opponent's beliefs enter the disagreement.
5. The opponents appear totally bad.
6. Charges are made against the opponents as persons.
7. The dispute becomes independent of the original disagreement.[3]

Some of the changes which take place in this progression are worth noting. First, the basis for the argument moves from the original specific issue to wider issues. Second, the situation intensifies as disagreement moves into outright hostility. Third, the focus of the disagreement moves from issues to persons. It is no longer ideas which are being attacked, it is the people themselves. This last change is particularly devastating, for when people start attacking people in the context of the Christian community, where love is supposed to be the basis for behavior, it is very ugly.

Yet another by-product of diversity is what might be called "loss of focus." If a group has too much diversity there are not enough common beliefs and goals upon which to base the group's existence, motivation and direction. In short, the "glue" is missing and the energy expended simply to hold the fragments of the group in close proximity to one another robs the group of any power to act. Compounding the problem is the fact that since the fragments do not function as a unit, the energy of the group is further divided and no concentrated action occurs. The result is ineffectiveness.

Not only does diversity diffuse the energy of the church, but it blurs the vision of the church to such a degree that even its planning becomes affected. Even if the group could muster enough energy to act, it may well have no clear place to expend that energy. The group can become so fragmented that there is no dominant goal or value system around which to build its existence.

Overall the negative side of diversity tends to involve pragmatic issues. Simply stated, a pluralistic church tends to be less effective than a homogeneous one. It is not as solid, attractive, or comfortable. Diversity appears to blur the belief system of the group, hinder interaction and assimilation, and weaken the group bond.

The Positive Side of Diversity

But there is, of course, another side to the issue. Although diversity does have its negative aspects, it can also have some real advantages.

First, diversity can lead to tolerance. To understand this concept one must first understand that a lack of diversity can lead to intolerance. A homogeneous group tends to experience a high degree of bonding. This kind of group, sharing the same goals, values, and beliefs, has both tremendous unity and an incredible amount of satisfaction. The people in these communities like each other, they like the group, and they like what the group is doing. What they don't like is disruption. Since diverse elements create disruption, the group, in order to avoid this unwanted fragmentation, strives to exclude any diverse elements. The group seeks to protect itself from "them." Sadly, this protectionism is often overdone and the community begins to see enemies around every corner. For some groups this pattern of protectionism becomes so ingrained it becomes the very reason for their existence. They exist simply to combat "the enemy" and no inner reasons remain. When this occurs the group must actually create enemies to fight in order to justify its existence. The enemy can take many shapes—the government, society in gen-

eral, particular beliefs or philosophies (secular humanism is a current favorite), various actions, or even other groups (churches). But whoever the enemy turns out to be, one thing is certain—the enemy is different from the group.

When diversity is present in a group this negative process is usually circumvented. If a group is already composed of different elements it is not as threatened by new elements and thus gravitates toward inclusion rather than exclusion. A creative intermingling becomes the norm, and the people involved learn to accept, or at the very least struggle, in an accepting way, with viewpoints different from their own.

This tolerance does not mean there is no conflict in a pluralistic group. On the contrary, conflict often becomes very much a part of the group's life together. This is unavoidable when people with different ideas, values, and goals are mixed together. But this conflict is not necessarily negative, although it can certainly be so. Indeed there is the possibility that this conflict can be a positive factor, for conflict creatively handled can have many benefits.

The positive nature of conflict can be seen in the current sociological perspective based on the assumption that diversity is a creative force in human society.[4] What can conflict do for a community? First, it can provide a medium for the release of that tension created by the group's plurality. This act of "venting" is extremely important, for, if it does not occur, then when conflict does arise, the results are more intense. Conflict acts in this case as a preventative factor which keeps polarization from occurring.

Second, conflict (and even the presence of diversity itself) can lead to what might be called "creative dialogue." Creative and growth-producing interaction is bound to occur when people with different goals, values, ideals and expectations gather together in a group setting. The mixing of these diverse elements acts as a stimulus which forces the members of the group to struggle, search, question and grow. The group's very existence is threatened by the conflict and diversity and it is forced to work at establishing its identity and of finding new reasons for existence. In short, people have to talk to one another about what they believe and why they exist, and that is good. Out of this dialogue comes an unexpected gift! Because of this need for dialogue the community is forced to establish a system which enables communication to happen in a creative way. New channels of communication are developed and maintained.

It is not true, of course, that conflict is always good. If it is not dealt with properly the result can be tragic. But in a well managed situation and within reasonable limits, conflict resulting from diversity can be beneficial.

The creation of tolerance is certainly not the only positive side effect of diversity. Diversity can also lead to effectiveness, as people with different experiences, ideas, talents and goals come together in one place at one time. Diversity can lead to a broadening of vision and an expansion of possibilities. With diversity more ideas will be forthcoming, and more resources will be available to transform those ideas into programs and ministries. To summarize, the homogeneous church is often a narrow church, while a heterogeneous church is often a church with both depth and breadth.

The point of this section is very simple. A good leader not only needs to know what kind of diversity is present in the group, but also what kind of impact that diversity is likely to have on the group dynamics. Will the diversity present draw the people together or drive them apart? Will it stimulate healthy dialogue, or create a group fight? Will it enable the group to become more effective, or will it hinder the group's progress?

If the leader can understand what is likely to happen then the possibility emerges that he or she can manage the diversity to create the desired results. If the negative influences cannot be totally avoided, perhaps they can be minimized. If the positive influences do not naturally emerge, perhaps they can be nurtured. It is to the task of managing diversity that we will now turn.

CHAPTER III

Building the Foundation

All churches make some sort of decision about how they will deal with diversity. This decision-making process takes place whether or not the church has consciously affirmed the presence of diversity and whether or not it has sought to understand the pluralities which affect it. Here are some of the ways churches tend to respond:

1. *Comfortable Indifference!* (The Rocking Chair) Let's simply sit and rock, reflect on the wonderful memories of yesterday, take care of our minimal comforts and let the rest of the world go by.

2. *Frustrated Mobility!* (The Treadmill) Much activity prevails but there is little significant progress since "the least common denominator" is the only one acceptable to the group. Nobody wants to step on anybody's toes. Persons with opposing points of view tend to cancel out opposite views, and group inaction results. People are frustrated. Nobody feels anything really significant is happening.

3. *Polarized Destructiveness!* (The Boxing Ring) Persons with opposite views tend to pound on the opposition and question their motives and methods in a demeaning way. Everyone is so concerned to make his or her point that no one is "really listening" to the other and "trying to walk in their shoes." Strife, defensiveness, and belittling remarks are common. In the name of "deep convictions" others are overridden and put down.

4. *Supportive Cooperation!* (Rowing the Boat Together) The currents are strong. The boat is not always ship-shape. Some row-

ers are weaker than others. But by pulling on the oars in coop-
erative rhythm there is a possibility of reaching the objective.
5. *Creative Interaction!* (Mulligan Stew) Each ingredient retains
its uniqueness and makes its unique contribution while at the
same time carrying the unmistakable flavor of the whole. Indi-
viduals hold deep convictions but are able to interact and rub
off each other. Meaningful compromise is possible amidst the
give-and-take. No one gets everything his or her own way. Peo-
ple feel "I'm being heard" and the general atmosphere is "we're
getting somewhere."[1]

The point is that there are many ways of responding to the pres-
ence of diversity. Some of them are healthy and acceptable, some
are not; some of them are planned, far too many of them are hap-
hazard instead. In response to this reality I would like to propose a
series of strategies which will help a church's response to diversity
be both planned and creative.

It is rather obvious that if a group is going to be together and
stay together there must be some sort of "glue" to create the neces-
sary bonding. The first two strategies deal with the process of creat-
ing, or at least maintaining, that "glue." These two strategies help
the local church develop a foundation upon which programs and
ministries can be built, and which can support the weight of diver-
sity.

Strategy One: Establish a Foundation

The first strategy is very basic: a church must establish a foundation;
it must know what it is going to consider essential for participation
in the community, what fundamental values it is going to build its
life around. It is clear that every church must accomplish this task,
no matter how wide open it leaves its boundaries, no matter how
much diversity it plans to allow. There must be some basis for un-
ity, for commonality, and this need cannot be ignored.

In the early church there was clearly a common thread that ran
through all of the writings and all of the diversity. There was one
basic confession of faith which was held to be true and basic for all
the Christian communities, no matter what their setting. That
confession was, to use the Gentile version, "Jesus is Lord" (Romans
10:9). Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free, Palestinian

and Roman, all were willing to affirm that Jesus is Lord. Peter made that affirmation in his first sermon to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost. To people of all nations he said, "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36) Paul made it a habit to refer to Jesus as Lord in all of his letters. It made no difference to whom he was writing. In Romans he begins:

> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the Gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendent of David and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead; Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:2-4)

To the church in Corinth he wrote:

> . . .there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. (I Cor. 8:6)

To the church in Ephesus he wrote:

> Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Note the scope of the usage of this confession. To churches in Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome, and to the unique people in them, the same confession of faith has been offered: "Jesus is Lord."

There are of course many other examples of such confessions in the New Testament, but these give us an adequate sense of the broad usage of this confession in the early church. There were certainly other beliefs which were held to be critical by individual churches, but this foundational confession was common to all of them. No group could, in any true sense, be called a Christian church if it did not adhere to this confession, or an equivalent version.

The church today needs to make a similar confession. It must have as its foundation a basic affirmation of Jesus as Lord. It must clearly state what belief is essential to its existence. This is necessary if a given community of faith is going to have any sense of unity

and commonality. It would serve a church well to pick some standard confession of faith, perhaps even one from the Bible which it might use as a core statement of its value system. This passage from Romans 10 can serve as an example:

> The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: that if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. (Romans 10:8-9)

A given church will, in fact, probably have a much more complex statement at the core of its life together. There is even the danger that a church might move from a very basic statement of faith to a very detailed statement full of rigid requirements and narrow doctrines. This would force the exclusion of a wide range of people from that church's fellowship and make diversity, at least theological diversity, very awkward. In spite of this danger, however, it is imperative that some sort of common confession be established.

A good example of what kind of core statements can be developed comes out of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). A report on congregational lifestyles established four common elements shared by the people of the church. It will be noted that these four elements are all flexible so that they allow for both unity and diversity. They are as follows:

Our Commonality of Faith

1. *The Book of Confessions*. The Book of Confessions provides confessional "standards" which are a unifying factor in our faith . . . The "standards" or Book of Confessions point to many places where Presbyterians can agree heartily. Yet they also point to a diversity of language and expression of these various statements about what we believe.

2. *Our Common Commitment*. Whatever diversity we have, we can point to our faith in Christ as a major point of commonality and a unifying principle. "Confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the scriptures bear witness to him. Obedience to Christ alone identifies the one universal church and supplies the continuity of its tradition. This obedience is the ground of the church's duty and freedom to reform itself in life and doctrine as new occasions, in God's providence, may demand. (9.03)

3. *Directory for Worship*. (Commonality of Worship and Spiritual Life) We are also given a sense of unity through our common worship life . . . Corporate prayer and worship, the reading of the Scripture together, and the celebration of the sacraments are unifying elements in our faith.

However, Presbyterians abhor any kind of rigid structure placed on their worship practices and the public acts of faith. Here is where the appeal to diversity of expression enters the picture. . .The Session gives supervision to worship experiences but is free to adopt practices and styles of their own choosing.

4. *Scriptures as Only Rule for Faith and Practice*. Presbyterian polity (and our sense of unity) are rooted and grounded in what our founders saw to be a scripturally sound system. They saw this as a major source of strength and unity. . . .

We have not traditionally applied the Scriptures in a legalistic or rigid fashion. Rather they have been a lamp for our feet, providing a guide and a ground of authority. . . .[2]

Such a statement as that just quoted offers a healthy model for a specific church to follow. Notice how the statement sticks to broad, inclusive themes and language while at the same time affirming some very important essentials: the Lordship of Christ; the Word of God; the need to confess Jesus as Lord; the necessity of ordered worship; the adoption of Scripture as the rule for faith and practice. An individual church could adopt a denominational statement such as this one or develop its own. It must be remembered that this is not a matter of setting "outer" boundaries, but an establishment of "core" or "center" beliefs upon which the community bases its life together.

The process of developing this center can be a very positive activity in its own right. In some churches workshops are held in which the goal is to develop a "confession of faith" for the church which can be used as a theological center. If the church is denominational in nature it might begin this process by examining the traditional confessions of the church. As an alternative the church might read some of the writings of men and women held in esteem by the congregation. After having done this examination the church would then be ready to affirm what it believes in its own words.

In the first church I served, interested members met for 13 weeks. For nine weeks they studied the confessions of their denomination and read works by famous theologians. For four weeks they worked at putting together a unique confession of faith. The group

decided to establish a relatively conservative center, somewhere in the middle of the theological spectrum. The result was a simple, basic, and effective confession used by the church in explaining its beliefs to potential members, new members, and youth.[3] This confession was simply an expression of the church's theological center, not a binding document, but it did prove useful in communicating the position of the church.

It is also important that a church, having chosen and expressed its theological center, find a way of communicating that center to the congregation. Some churches have had their statements of faith printed up on cards and placed in the pews. Others have expressed their theological stance in writing for use in New Member classes. Others include such a statement in letters to visitors.

Statements of faith can be used in many ways. In the churches I have been a part of such a statement is often used not only for understanding but also for planning. The church, when it sets goals, plans ministries, and develops strategies uses its "core statement" as a guide. It is careful to set goals and develop ministries which are consistent with the church's place on the theological spectrum. Such an awareness of the church's center can have tremendous impact. A church, for example, on the conservative end of the scale might well decide that an every house visitation of its community is in keeping with its theological stance. A church on the liberal end might decide that such an effort is not consistent with its place in the scheme of things. A church which has chosen to be overtly "evangelistic" in nature might well plan to include an altar call in its worship, while another church might just as intentionally choose not to include such an element.

What is critical about this strategy is the understanding it creates. As a church examines itself in this way it comes to understand its very nature, and it comes to understand what is and isn't possible in terms of program and style. A given church is not going to be attractive to everybody. If it goes through this process it can concentrate its effort on those who are most likely to be receptive. A church cannot use strategies which are not natural to it. What works in a conservative church will not necessarily work in a liberal church, and vice versa. A church that understands its center is less likely to attempt strategies which will not work.

A church that is clear about its nature is also less likely to find itself plagued by unhappy members. Having been intentional about its theological center it has helped those people who have looked at it to decide whether it is really acceptable to them. (I assume at this point that most churches will not appeal to the entire spectrum, but only to those who are within a certain range; an attempt to ap-

peal to the total spectrum can severely damage effectiveness.) There are fewer surprises, and fewer violated expectations. If a person with a different perspective does join the church, they do so with eyes wide open.

Establish a foundation. A place to begin in the process of dealing with diversity.

Strategy Two: Choose a Congregational Style

The second strategy involves establishing a "style" for a particular congregation which will allow for growth and unity in the midst of diversity. This kind of style does not just "happen" by some lucky accident to faith. It must be consciously chosen and developed by the congregation. There are a number of possible congregational styles, some which will allow for the creative process of diversity and some which will not. Here is one set of possibilities:

1. Uni-faith/uni-mission. In this style the congregation has a uni-centered faith understanding, as well as a uni-centered understanding of mission.
2. Uni-faith/multi-mission. In this style the congregation has come to a common understanding of faith but has chosen diverse ways of expressing that faith through mission.
3. Multi-faith/uni-mission. This congregation accommodates diverse understanding of faith but has a unified thrust in its mission efforts.
4. Multi-faith/multi-mission. This style accommodates diversity in both understanding of faith and mission but all are committed to living together and engaging in witnessing dialogue.[4]

These particular styles cover, in broad strokes, the entire spectrum of possibilities in the area of congregational life-style. On the one end (Uni-Faith/Uni-Mission) is pictured a very homogeneous church while on the other end (Multi-Faith/Multi-Mission) is pictured a radically heterogeneous church. This list of models, while not exhaustive, offers a good starting point for any church seeking to develop its own model.

Of course each of these models has its own strengths and weaknesses. The uni-faith/uni-style model, experiencing the least internal

diversity, also experiences the least internal tension. It is able therefore to direct its efforts in a single, forceful thrust. Since the church unifies around a single faith understanding and mission concept it does not have to divide its energies and resources but can direct them in such a way that the impact is maximized. But such a model does have its problems. While such singleness of vision may unify it may also result in a narrow and limited vision. Those who adopt such a model may develop a self-righteous attitude which looks disparagingly at those with diverse styles of faith.

The uni-faith/multi-mission model has the advantage of a common theological understanding. This creates a firm foundation of trust and makes it easier for the leadership to draw the people together for effective action. The diversity of mission means that the church is able to develop a wide range of ministries and is able to satisfy a large number of priorities and mobilize the whole spectrum of gifts and talents. Again the danger is that a single faith understanding may encourage self-righteousness. A secondary danger is that the church, because of its diversity of mission, may spread itself too thin, expending its energy and resources in too many directions. This can lead to shallowness in mission and a lack of coordinated effort.

The multi-faith/uni-mission model finds its greatest strengths in its diversity. Because it is more inclusive theologically it is able to accept and encourage a great deal of dialogue and searching. People are able to work through their beliefs, and express their priorities freely. This greater inclusiveness also allows a wider variety of resources to be used in approaching the unified mission thrust. But the very source of this model's strength is also the source of its weakness. The great theological diversity may well result in the congregation's minimizing faith issues and commitment, with a subsequent lack of spiritual depth. Without such depth, effective mission is not possible. The common mission focus can also be a source of trouble. This advantageous unity may sometimes create a myopia of mission which diminishes the church's a ility to reach out to the world in creative and diverse ways.

The multi-faith/multi-mission model finds its strength in its ability to appeal to a wide variety of people and in its power to develop a variety of opportunities for service and nurture. Its weakness lies in the fact that this very diversity can result in the church's failing to develop a theological center. Without this center the congregation will often lack unity and will fragment. It is also difficult, without some sort of unity, to develop a common direction in mission and the attempts to coordinate the diverse mission efforts can become overwhelming.

It is obvious that each of these models, in spite of the strengths they exhibit, also has weaknesses. This should not stop a church from being intentional about its style. But how does a church go about developing this style? Certainly one place to begin is with a biblical examination of the subject. A church could approach the subject by taking a clear look at the nature of the early church. On the basis of such a study certain conclusions might be made as to which model is most acceptable to that particular church. Let me say at this point that from a biblical standpoint it is difficult to advocate one style over another. Certainly one lesson we learn from the scriptures is that the early church often took different forms. If this is the only lesson that is learned from such a study, the time will be well spent. Complicating matters is the fact that individual churches and denominations tend to read the Bible with a degree of bias. Certain sections of scripture are weighted more heavily than others. Many mainline churches, for example, place a great deal of emphasis on Paul, while evangelistic churches like the Gospels and charismatic churches like the book of Acts. As a result the "biblical" style chosen by one church may well be different from the style chosen by another. But that is acceptable, if we accept the reality that the early church chose different styles in response to the kind of the people it had in its midst and the kind of people to whom it was ministering.

A church might also want to take some time in this process to develop a clearer understanding of its current status. What kind of church currently exists? Lyle Schaller calls this process "Looking in the Mirror." This is a very important task. Every church needs to understand what it is like. The church can then take that understanding, place it next to its new biblical understanding, and use those two elements to respond with a new and authentic style.

Another element to be studied is the setting in which the church finds itself. Is it a rural church, or an urban church? Who are the people this church is trying to reach? Are they homogeneous, or heterogeneous? What are the problems those people face—hunger, poverty, age, loneliness? It is only as the church understands the nature of the needs it is being called upon to meet that it can adequately choose the kinds of mission it needs to adopt. A church might well decide that it is an "evangelical" church and that it would like to develop a mission strategy consistent with that identity. However if that church is surrounded by people with many economic needs, the church may need to develop a mission strategy which includes "social action." This is not to say that a church must choose mission causes which violate its sense of identity. A

very conservative church would find it very difficult to get involved in the support of a Planned Parenthood Clinic. A more liberal church might affirm such involvement.

While looking at its nature the church should also take an honest look at its staff and resources. How much diversity can they realistically handle? Does it have the ability to deal with a variety of programs? Can the church leadership deal with the kind of tension and conflict that sometimes arises when diversity is present? Also important is the presence of resources outside of the church. Are there other religious groups available in the community? What strengths and weaknesses do those groups have? Is there a church out there which can deal with a particular ministry more effectively than your church? Is there a church your congregation can team up with in order to effectively develop a peculiar kind of ministry? Such a study of resources and staff will also help a church identify what it does well, and will enable the church to maximize its strengths and minimize its weaknesses. Many churches choose to "specialize." They choose to be uni-mission or at the very most, limited-mission churches, and put all of their efforts into one ministry, or into a very limited number of unique ministries. Study your resources.

In one church the governing body purposefully chose a congregational lifestyle which was essentially uni-faith/multi-mission in nature. Since the church was in a small conservative community serviced by a number of diverse church groups, it was decided that a relatively clear theological center could be established without fear that a substantial cross-section of the community would be left without a church possibility. It was felt that the options available among the churches in the community would fill the need for theological diversity. In contrast the church decided to adopt a wide range of mission causes. This was a response to the large number of denominational backgrounds present in the congregation. While this denominational diversity was not theological in nature, due to the similarity of the denominations involved, each denomination represented had its own mission priorities, and its own traditional areas of involvement. Thus, in order to give people a chance to respond to the world in familiar ways, a variety of mission options was encouraged. On the local level one committee developed a visitation program in which every non-church home in the community was visited. At the same time another committee helped begin a community-wide senior citizen program which was totally secular in orientation. Thus people with widely diverse concepts of ministry were able to find a place to become involved. This same philosophy

was carried over into the area of mission giving. The governing board encouraged the multi-mission nature of the congregation by approving a wide range of mission causes for congregational support, and allowed designated giving whereby a family could specify which of those approved causes it would support with its mission dollars. This decision was the result of a desire to be truly inclusive in the area of missions. It allowed families to support projects they were enthusiastic about, while enabling them to avoid the support of ministries with which they did not feel comfortable. It is interesting to note that few families actually took advantage of the offer. Most of them were happy with the wide range reflected in the church's approved causes and simply gave to the general mission fund. It was important to many of the people, however, that the offer be extended.

Another church chose to be both multi-faith and multi-mission. In this particular church it was felt that a wide variety of backgrounds and beliefs was both attractive and biblical. It was very intentional in its efforts to narrow down the church's confession of faith to the bare minimum. It insisted only that church members affirm the fact that "Jesus is Lord." The variety of faith was affirmed on many levels. In the area of education a number of classes were offered for adults with a wide range of interests represented. In these various classes questions were encouraged and dealt with sensitively. Even the church library reflected the pluralism as the books bought for the church library were consciously chosen from a variety of perspectives. The worship life of the church also was designed to accommodate the differences present. To begin with the church offered two services which were designed to be very different in style and content. Only the sermon remained constant. And within each of those services various elements were introduced to help a variety of people feel comfortable and welcome. There was, for example, both liturgy and a time of personal sharing. There were traditional anthems, and congregational singing with guitar accompaniment. Even the hymns were chosen with a mind to the ever-present diversity.

The church also chose to have a wide range of mission causes. It supported a volunteer program designed to help elderly people remain in their homes, and supported a local evangelical "halfway house." It provided a place for community discussion of the apartheid issue, and showed a film series by Dr. James Dobson, a well-known proponent of conservative values. Again the desire was to provide different options for some very different kinds of Christians.

Those are just two brief illustrations of how churches can

choose a congregational style, and then use that style to guide the development of its life together. What is your church's style? How will your church implement that style in its programs, its teaching, its mission, and its worship?

Summary

Some of what has been said in this section may seem self-evident. And yet I am amazed at how many churches have never taken the time to develop a firm foundation upon which to build their program and ministry. Instead of developing their ministry purposefully, they simply piece their program together haphazardly and as a result fail to reach their full potential.

It is critical to take the time to build the foundation. If you do not the house may well come tumbling down!

CHAPTER IV

Looking in the Mirror

A little girl stayed for dinner at the home of her first-grade friend. The vegetable was buttered broccoli and the mother asked if she liked it. The child replied very politely, "Oh, yes, I love it." But when the bowl of broccoli was passed she refused to take any. The hostess, puzzled, said, "I thought you said you loved broccoli?" The girl replied sweetly, "Oh, yes, I do, but not enough to eat it!"

The moral is simple. Partial knowledge makes for bad decisions. Or to say it another way, the more you know the better off you are. Let me take that axiom one step further. The more the congregation knows, the better off it is. Once a church has established its foundation and has chosen its congregational style it must go about the process of educating its members. There is important information the people of the church must have if the dangers of diversity are to be avoided.

Strategy Three: Make Pluralism Conscious

This third strategy is deceptively simple: make the pluralism in the church conscious. It is surprising how difficult this task is for many churches. All too often, because diversity tends to be uncomfortable, people in the church try to suppress their differences. They pretend that the difficulties aren't there in order to avoid conflict, or something worse.

Unfortunately this strategy is usually self-defeating, for the effects of repressing diversity are usually more destructive than the effects of dealing with it openly. The main problem is that unresolved tension drains the church of energy. It takes a lot of work to contain

feelings, to maintain the masks, and to keep the organization running smoothly. Added to the problem are the subtle conflicts which do take place. These confrontations are all the more dangerous for their hidden nature. Because they do not take place openly it is far more difficult to deal with them.

Because it is true that suppressed pluralism is a defeating pluralism, the conclusion can be drawn that the reverse is probably also true: a conscious pluralism is a constructive pluralism. In fact this is true. Openness is without a doubt a critical element in the effort to deal with diversity. Let me emphasize at this point that this sought after openness is not synonymous with agreement. Indeed often the act of bringing diversity out into the open will lead to disagreement and conflict. However the point is that this disagreement and conflict are not necessarily negative. They have the potential for being positive catalysts for growth. It is possible to go so far as to say that the congregation that learns to fight together is the congregation that stays together.

The reason openness is so crucial has something to do with the problem of resolution. Openness may lead to anger, but it also leads to communication. It is true that often the people involved in the dialogue may be angry, furiously angry at each other, but at least they are talking. And that is important, for dialogue creates the possibility of resolution. Undisclosed diversity and conflict cannot be resolved. They are like an undiagnosed illness which slowly but surely destroys the body they inhabit.

The focus of this valuable strategy therefore involves the gathering of data so that the people of the church will understand the dynamics of their fellowship and the reasons why the church reacts the way it does to specific situations and input. For example, if a church understands that it has a large block of charismatics it will better understand the rumblings about worship being too dull; if it understands that it has a large group of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 it will understand why the issue of sexuality surfaces so often; if it understands that it has large numbers of divorced persons it will know why the sermon on divorce had such an impact.

A church needs to be very purposeful about the task of gathering data about itself, and using that data to give it a clear image of itself. The information gained should help parties affected by conflict and diversity to understand the dynamics of the situation and thus move toward a solution. It is important to understand that this process of gathering information is not an end but a means. The goal of exposure is not simply to uncover, but finally to enable resolution. The goal is the proper management of the situation.

Certainly the first step in this process must be the gathering of information. Somehow the church must gain an understanding of its nature and constituency. There are a number of ways this can be done. The four most common methods are:

1. Questionnaires
2. Interviews
3. Small group dialogues
4. Direct observation

It is worth taking a brief look at these various methods. Let us begin with questionnaires. Questionnaires can be used to gather all different kinds of information. One church used a questionnaire to ask people about their likes and dislikes in music. Another used a questionnaire to discover what kinds of topics adults would like discussed in adult education programs. Yet another church concerned about its worship format used a questionnaire to determine what its members sought from worship. Don't be afraid to use questionnaires to gather the information you need.

Interviews can also be extremely helpful in the process of gaining information about the church. Members can be interviewed about many different topics. One church interviewed a number of its members by asking them just one question. "What does our pastor do best?" This information was used to help the pastor establish effective priorities. Another church interviewed a large cross-section of its people about their feelings about a number of crucial social issues. That information was used to help establish the church's mission priorities. But the interviews need not be confined to members. Often it is helpful to interview people outside the church in order to get their perspectives. One church spent a lot of time asking people in its community, "What do you think of when you think of Covenant Church?" The answers helped the church understand how it was seen in the community, and this information was used in planning for the future. The basic maxim is: If you want to know the answers, ask questions.

Small group dialogues can also be a useful tool in the process of gathering the facts. Many churches have chosen to use already existing groups in this process. When an issue or question surfaces they ask such groups as a women's study group, a men's breakfast, or the choir to engage in dialogue about the topic in question. Other churches have chosen a very different route. Instead of using

existing groups they develop study committees to deal with the is-
sues at hand. The job of the group, usually made up of a represent-
ative cross section of the church, is to examine the issue carefully
and report its observations.

There are a number of ways to stimulate this dialogue. In some
cases questions are used. A chosen (or elected) moderator uses
these prepared questions to begin the discussion and to keep it
constructive and on track. It is important in these kinds of groups to
ask the right questions. Usually it is better to keep the questions
positive in nature. Once a group moves into a negative mode it is
very difficult to move it toward a more positive stance. Sometimes
an outside resource might be introduced. In one community a col-
lege professor with expertise in the area of theology and ethics was
asked to work with a study group which was studying a particular
moral issue. The presence of this outside person opened up some
new doors and moved the committee into a very creative discussion
of the issue. Case studies can also stimulate interesting and lively
discussions. One church, while struggling on the abortion issue,
presented a series in which a group studied a set of case studies to
decide, on the basis of the knowledge presented, whether abortion
might be a viable Christian option. The result was a series of
thought-provoking dialogues which benefited all present.

A final method which can be used to gain necessary information
is what might be called simply "observation," gathering information
pertinent to the topic in question. For example a person might es-
tablish the overall make-up of a particular congregation simply by
studying the membership role. The group which is most regular in
attendance at worship might be discovered by observing those pres-
ent each Sunday morning for a given amount of time. The group
least satisfied with the current worship style might be ascertained
by use of the same method. Look around you, gather the necessary
demographics, and come to a clear understanding of your church!

Of course the gathering of information is only the first step in
the process of making pluralism conscious in a church. After the in-
formation has been gathered, it must then be disseminated to the
congregation at large. Remember that the reason for going to all of
this trouble is the congregation's need to understand clearly the di-
versity in its midst. The process of dissemination can take many
forms. My first congregation developed a flyer which described not
only the programs offered by the church, but also the nature of the
congregation. This interpretive piece was distributed among church
members and was also used by the outreach committee during vis-
its to potential members. My current church, realizing the signifi-

cance of the geographic distribution of its members, placed maps of the community and surrounding area in a prominent place and then marked the residences of the members with pins. This helped members see their church in a new light. This church also uses the bulletin insert as a tool for communicating with the congregation. Each week a different church family is highlighted, with all kinds of information being offered, including education, job, and family makeup. Different ministries within the church are also highlighted. One week an effort to communicate the Gospel to non-Christians is described, while the next week the church's involvement in peace-making is explored.

It is not enough, however, simply to communicate the information. This information will not be particularly helpful unless it is also interpreted. For example, sermons can be used not only to give the congregation information about the presence of diversity, but they can also be used to teach about living with that diversity. In these sermons the major themes of unity, tolerance, Christian love, and acceptance can be the focus. Christian education classes can be used in a similar way. In a relatively conservative church Ray Stedman's book *Body Life* was used for an adult study class. The people in that class were challenged to expand dramatically their view of the church and its ministry. A less conservative church used a study from David C. Cook known as *Future Shock*. This study examined a number of issues important to both ends of the theological spectrum (such as pollution, abortion, and corporate crime), and offered perspectives on those issues from many different kinds of people. The study did not offer clear solutions but instead outlined the various options available. The class thus provided a format for the exploration of diversity among all Christians, some theological input on pluralism, and an opportunity to explore the diversity present in that local church.

Eventually the information regarding diversity must also be shared with those outside the church. It is important that potential members and the community at large see the church as it really is, if the community and the church are to interact in a meaningful way, and if potential members are going to develop the kind of knowledgeable relationship with the church that will be productive and long-standing. Flyers are often used to place such information in the hands of the general public. These can be handed out or mailed. A large number of congregations mail such flyers to those who have visited the church. Advertisements in the newspaper can also be a means of dissemination. I am not referring to those little box advertisements which contain the church's name and the ser-

mon title but to longer ads which explain the church's constituency and programming.

It is important to define the diversity present in a church, and then to communicate and interpret that information. A wise church takes the time to perform this critical task.

Strategy Four: Understanding Conflict

It is always important to remember that conflict is often a by-product of diversity. The presence of conflict is not always negative, for it can be a stimulant which creates growth if it is well managed. But conflict is complex in nature and if this management is to be successful some understanding of diversity must be present. Leaders must realize that there are different kinds of conflict, and that the differences are significant. Sometimes the conflict is a direct reflection of the diversity present, but sometimes it reflects instead a complex set of factors, only some of which actually relate to the diversity of the congregation. What seems on the surface to be a conflict over a specific issue may actually have nothing to do with that issue at all; it may be due instead to a division hidden deep within the church and the issue may merely provide an excuse for a fight. This reality may be reflected in the fact that the actual theological or sociological composition of the church may not be reflected in the positions people take on that issue.

A good summary of the kinds of polarizations which cause conflict is given in *Church Fights* by Leas and Kittlaus. They list three major kinds of conflicts. The first kind is known as "two-pole conflict."[1] The key to this type of conflict is the presence of "parties" or "camps" within the church. These camps can be built around factors such as family affiliation, tenure in the church, or common experiences, and they are extremely powerful. One's participation in the group determines how one responds to a particular issue. In other words, the group one belongs to is more important than the issue which is at stake.

A good example of this kind of conflict was found in a small rural community. In that town conflict arose surrounding the Superintendent of Public Schools. One group, angry that certain dress codes and patterns of discipline were being changed, charged that the school administration was "humanistic" and "non-Christian." The other group, supportive of the changes in the school's philosophy, backed the administration and said its opponents were "backward" and "dehumanizing." Initially it seemed that, because of the

issues, conflict was between the religious and social conservatives in the community and those who were more liberal. To have responded to this conflict with that presupposition in mind would have been disastrous for such was not the case. In reality it was a split between the long-term residents of the community, especially those whose families went back many generations, and new residents. Both groups consisted of a mixture of liberals and conservatives. The conflict was not really over the issues at all; it was a party fight. Although such issues as discipline were the focus of the public debates and the ongoing dialogue, they were only secondary. This could be seen in some inconsistencies which emerged. For example the "old-timers," while complaining bitterly that the administration was "non-Christian" for allowing values clarification classes, wholeheartedly supported a single teacher who was involved in an inappropriate way with a student. The true issue was which party that teacher belonged to, not his behavior from a Christian perspective. Similar inconsistencies emerged from the other side.

The point is this: To respond to that crisis on the basis of the issues which were being publicly debated was to miss the point completely. The issues were secondary. A person could proceed logically through the issues at hand until all eternity, and no one would change their position, for the presenting issue was not really the critical factor. The conflict, to be managed, had to be dealt with as a party struggle. Only then was some sort of resolution possible.

A second type of conflict involves a multiple set of parties or blocks. Instead of only two groups there are three, or four, or more. In this situation the parties are not as broadly based but tend to be more specialized. Instead of dividing along such lines as conservative and liberal, long-term resident and newcomers, the community divides along the lines of age, class, office, theology, economics, and other more diversified groupings. There can be many divisions possible if ages becomes the basis for parties. There are children (1-12), younger youth (13-17), older youth (18-21), young adults (21-29), the early career group (30-39) and more. This makes this kind of conflict even more complex and difficult to handle than the simpler two-party conflict.

An example of multi-parties in action occurred in a church which had just included a youth pastor on its staff for the first time. There were three basic responses to this young person, with various age groups forming the parameters for the various categories. According to the group made up of youth and older children, the youth minister could do no wrong. Even if he did make a mistake this group protectively supported him. There was another party ac-

cording to whom this young man could do no right. This included the older people, the young adults whose children were too young to be involved in his programs, and, surprisingly, the children under seven. The adults in this group jumped on every mistake the youth leader made and failed to notice, or at least give him credit for, his successes. The children were simply afraid of him because of his overbearing manner. A strange alliance in many ways but a clear block. Finally there was a third party made up of those parents whose children were involved in the program and those adults who were the age of the youth minister's parents, middle aged. This group responded quite rationally seeing both sides of the issue and expressing both their frustration and their joy at the man's ministry. This party was the only one of the three which was truly "issue oriented." The other groups had other agendas.

This leads to a third type of conflict, one based on issues rather than on parties. With this kind of conflict the issues are the issue and the constituencies shift as the issues shift. With this kind of conflict people who are opponents on one issue may find themselves allies on the next issue. This is obviously the most healthy kind of conflict because it is issue based and can be dealt with and resolved by the use of dialogue and reason. Long-term conflict between parties is often very difficult, if not impossible, to resolve. If the school fight mentioned earlier had been issue centered, then dialogue, the sharing of information, and other such strategies might have been effective in defusing the situation. Because it was not, all such attempts to handle the situation failed, and in some instances the conflict was actually intensified.

Church leaders need to know whether they are dealing with a party conflict or an issue conflict if they are to have any chance of managing the strife creatively. When the conflict is issue oriented the leaders can concentrate their efforts on dealing with the issue. It can be debated, information can be imparted, understanding achieved, tolerance developed, and resolution accomplished. When it is a party conflict the leaders can often do little more than stand in the breach and show affirmation and love to all sides, hoping that through God's power they can help the parties come to love each other. At times simply helping the parties involved see that the struggle may well be about things other than those publicly identified may help the healing begin. At other times discovering who the parties' leaders are can be useful in helping manage the conflict. Those people can be talked to, and at times brought together for meaningful dialogue.

Other tactics can be implemented even when conflict is not

present which can help provide a basis for creative management. Sermons can be an important tool, for through them the pastor can teach about some basic Christian principles which apply to conflict situations (love your enemy, turn the other cheek, etc.). Training sessions can be offered which will teach the people about the nature of conflict. A Saturday retreat could be held in which the different types of conflict are explored. A workshop in conflict management or resolution might also be helpful. This kind of workshop can be very attractive to church members for many people can use such training to help them in their secular work. A less direct, but still effective strategy involves teaching the people of the church listening skills. Such a workshop can help develop the relational skills necessary to deal with conflict in a positive manner. I strongly suggest Dr. John Savage's *L.E.A.D. Lab I* as one possibility.[2]

Summary

Both of these strategies assume the same basic maxim. The more you know about something the better you can manage it. I firmly believe that church leaders and church members need to understand diversity and conflict. They need to understand the nature and impact of diversity. They need to understand the kinds of conflict possible. For then and only then can creative strategies be established and division and turmoil be avoided. It is not that such understanding will get rid of the diversity or the conflict or that the strategies will remove all discomfort. That is too much to hope for realistically. But such understanding and management can make a difference.

CHAPTER V

Gluing the Pieces Together

It is necessary to remember that when we talk about the church we are talking about people—real, live, breathing, individual people. And it is necessary to remember that if the church is to truly be The Church these individuals must somehow be brought together into a radical unity. They must become "God's people," the "body of Christ." This is a very difficult task. It is not enough simply to bring the people of God together and expect unity to happen as if by magic. The key to such unity may be the presence of God in the Holy Spirit, but God expects a cooperative effort. He wants us to work with him to make this unity happen. That is why, in the effort to manage diversity, relational concerns are of primary importance. We must develop some strategies which will help people draw together in love.

Strategy Five: Develop Interdependence

An extremely helpful strategy involves bringing the various groups within the church together in a working relationship. This is not the same as bringing the various groups together for dialogue, for it is not a matter of talking together but of working together. The basic assumption is that when people from diverse groups begin to work together toward a common goal, some very important things begin to happen. First, polarization is avoided. The very fact that these two groups are constantly forced to be together helps ensure a continuous venting of minor grievances. This expression defuses anger and makes it more difficult for a split to occur. A keen sense of interdependence is also developed. Individuals, though frequently oppo-

nents, are placed in situations where they must share in a common decision-making process. As they share in this process they learn more about each other, they have a joint influence on the decisions which are made, and they learn to share talents and abilities. In short, they learn to depend upon each other.

It is often helpful to begin by bringing these different people together to do a task about which they both agree. This allows them to work together in a comfort zone. In this relatively non-threatening environment, relationships can be built which are very helpful in the management of the existing pluralism. Once the barriers begin to crumble then more controversial tasks may be assigned.

In one church two groups were constantly in conflict. The church leadership was pressed to find a safe environment in which these two groups could interact. Finally they decided to invite key leaders from each group to perform a common task, and so the two groups were brought together to paint the fellowship hall. As the task began, there was an uncomfortable silence. But by the end of the job both groups were talking together freely and warmly. It was the beginning of an incredible process of healing. As one man later said, "Breaking bread together did not break down the walls between us, but dipping rollers did."

In one church I served, this tactic was used in the area of Christian education. There was a tendency for the adults involved in this area of ministry to divide along clear lines. The conservatives always chose to attend classes involving Bible study and the more liberal members always chose classes which explored issues and social concerns. This created a certain degree of polarization. One person in the Bible study group characterized the people in the other group as "non-spiritual" because they didn't study the Bible in that class. Those in the optional class referred to the Bible study group as "spiritual snobs." In an attempt to solve this problem the adults were encouraged to participate in different kinds of classes. This was, naturally, only partially effective. A final attempt involved coordinating the topics studied by the various groups. One quarter, the Bible study class explored the book of Ephesians, a theology class studied the church through the use of a book based on Ephesians, and a class on Christian living studied a book focused on the need for Christians to be caring, healing people. The last several sessions of the quarter the three classes met together, sharing what they had learned and learning from each other. It was a rewarding experience in which interdependence, trust, and communication were established.

In a downtown church adult education offered another opportunity to develop a sense of interdependence as the diversity of

the people was used to teach. In one case a group was studying a section of the Bible in which agricultural motifs were present. A number of farmers from the church were invited to share the implications of the passages from a farmer's perspective. It was a rich experience for those who did not understand farming. In another instance a class was studying a passage which dealt with money. The author of the study being used insisted that in the Bible the poor are portrayed as having a spiritual advantage over the wealthy. A number of people from the congregation who were poor offered to share with the class how their financial woes helped them grow in their faith. The experience was revealing for many who had never experienced any real shortage of money. It not only helped the class gain a new understanding of such themes as trust and dependence upon God, but also helped them understand and relate to the poor in a new way. For many it was the first time they had entered into a true dialogue on the topic of economics with someone from a different economic stratum. They learned that those caught in a financial squeeze are often victims, not lazy or stupid, and they learned to value them. It also gave many in the group a new vision for ministry. In some cases wealthy persons were able to find creative ways to help those less fortunate. This help was not given in a patronizing way but in love, and was received in the same spirit. The poor, in turn, learned that the wealthy are good people, and that the church really does care. As people struggled together to understand the Bible some very big walls were torn down. Bring diverse groups together to do a common task. It does make a difference!

Strategy Six: Recognize the Value of Others

If diversity is to be creative, it is imperative that the church and its members learn to accept as valuable and important those who are different from them, and have ideas and ministries which are different from theirs. Too many times people in a congregation do not work together and do not grow together because they do not accept the value of one another in their diversity. Too often churches do not further the cause of God's kingdom because they cannot appreciate efforts which do not conform to their peculiar vision of ministry. The person with a powerful spiritual awareness says to the one with a strong social conscience, "You are not spiritual enough; I want nothing to do with you," and the person with social awareness says in return, "You are not practical enough; I want nothing to do with you." What they both need to realize is they can help each

other. Spiritual giants would find their faith strengthened even
more if they learned to live that faith out in practical action. Social
warriors would be strengthened in their actions by the deepening
of their spiritual roots. Tragic isolation can be overcome when the
two join to supplement each other and stretch each other through
mutual acceptance and esteem.

The attitude that is appropriate is reflected by Elizabeth O'Con-
ner in her book *Letters to Scattered Pilgrims*:

> The overarching theme of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is the
> unity of the whole created order. We are knit and bonded to
> each other as our own bodies are knit and bonded together. I
> am not fully developing my gift unless you are exercising your
> gift. We are inextricably related to one another. My small group
> cannot fully do its work unless yours is doing its work. The
> hand needs the foot.[1]

This same attitude is reflected by a man from a very different cul-
ture and emphasis—Juan Carlos Ortiz, a charismatic pastor from Ar-
gentina. In his book, *Disciple*, he writes:

> Obviously today we are not one. We are in many groups. We are
> Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals of many kinds, Nazarenes,
> Salvation Army, Episcopalians, Plymouth Brethren, Baptists of
> many kinds, and others as well. God is regrouping us. He has
> already begun. He is not using our categories however. God has
> only two groups—those who love each other, and those who
> don't.[2]

Ortiz's call is for Christians to become "mashed potato" Christians,
people who in spite of differences reflect a radical unity.

It must be remembered that this is more than tolerance. This is
affirmation. It is not saying, "I will allow its presence," it is saying "I
affirm its presence"; the key words are "value" and "strength."
Those different from us *do* have value, as much value as we do.
Their strength works together with our strength and together we
become the whole body of Christ.

Much of the responsibility in this area lies with the pastors, who
can model the necessary attitude. They can preach about it, teach it,
call for it, enable its happening, and live it. They can nurture it. In
one suburban church this kind of nurture took place in the area of

mission interpretation. After people presented their favorite missions during worship they were asked to prepare a second presentation. This time they were to research and present a very different cause. Not only did the process of researching these causes give the presenter a new vision of what the cause was about, but the presentations, coming from persons traditionally uninvolved in such causes, gained added impact. When the conservatives in the congregation saw one of their group excited about supporting minority colleges, they began to open up to the value of that mission. When those from a more liberal group within the fellowship heard one of their persuasion telling of the denomination's efforts to share the Good News in Africa, they began to see the importance of the task more clearly. This crossing of party lines was of critical importance and had a significant impact upon the church's plurality.

In another church all the committees, classes and groups adopted a very important rule: no one could say something negative about another person, another idea, and value, unless they had first said at least three positive things about that person, idea, or value. It worked. Taking the time to discover the value of those people who are different from you can make all the difference in the world.

Strategy Seven: Develop the Right Atmosphere

The understanding that those within the church must recognize the worth and strength of those who are different from them leads to yet another strategy, the development of a positive atmosphere. Of course many of the actions which lead to the creative use of diversity will help develop a positive atmosphere, but a church cannot just sit back and hope that it will develop naturally. The church leadership must consciously take the lead in the shaping of the atmosphere, developing a dynamic that will support the presence of diverse elements within the church.

So what can the leadership do? First they can use the right language. Lyle Schaller, in an article written for the *Parish Paper* of the Yokefellow Institute gives an excellent example of the kind of language that is needed.[3] He suggests that when talking about potentially divisive issues the people of the church use "both/and" language rather than "either/or" language. By using language which allows for choices and options the leaders minimize the occasions when decision-making will be divisive. Of course the change in language should also reflect a change in reality. Not only should the leadership use "both/and" language, they should, in fact, offer real,

positive options. In the arena of Christian Education for example, instead of saying to the congregation, "You can either study a book of the Bible, or you can discuss an issue—you must choose one or the other," leaders should say, "We have two exciting options for you, a class on the Bible and a class on current issues." Use positive language, offer options, and do not force people into making potentially divisive choices.

Another way to help build an atmosphere where diversity is positive is to eliminate the political games which often occur within organizations. Manipulation, secrecy and deceit are destructive in a church that wishes to have creative diversity. In such a church the keynote should be integrity. Everything should be "out front" where people can deal with the issues at hand without having to worry whether something is going on behind the scene which will undercut them. People need to know they are not being used or manipulated into a corner. The leadership of the church can be instrumental in the development of this kind of trust. The pastor, church board, and other leaders must model helpful behavior for the rest of the congregation. Never, for example, should a pastor manipulate a person or group within the church to obtain what he or she wants. The end may be admirable, but the means may handicap further efforts to do ministry, foster dialogue, and resolve conflict. In a small Presbyterian congregation the leaders decided to work on the issue of trust. Normally the budget of this church is developed by the Session, or church board, as is mandated by the denomination's form of government. In this church, however, the leaders decided to include the congregation in the entire process. Each church committee was asked to submit its budget requests. They were asked to tell the board what they wanted to do during the next year and how much they thought that ministry might cost. The board took these requests and, after discussion, inserted them into the proposed budget. The next step was to take the goals to the congregation at a church potluck dinner. They began by showing the people of the church the goals established by the various committees, *without any monetary figure attached*, and then asked for further suggestions. Once the goals were agreed upon, they asked the people how much they felt it would cost to achieve these goals. The result was a proposed budget from the congregation. This proposed budget was then placed next to the budget from the church board, and the differences reconciled. The result was the final budget. Not only did this process reveal to the people how their money was being used, it taught them about the cost of run-

ning a church, and it built a high level of trust. An added bonus was that giving improved dramatically.

A third tactic involves focus. If the atmosphere is to be conducive to a creative pluralism, it must be positive, and so the positive must be accentuated. Usually there is plenty to be positive about. In fact the pastor must be a cheerleader. The pastor as leader must call an event a success before anyone else has a chance to say it isn't. In a similar vein the pastor tells church leaders to count the "yes" votes rather than the "no" votes. Take as an example the following scenario: A church is interested in establishing a special Bible study group to explore the book of Luke and the idea is presented to the church for a vote. The tally is 346 votes "no" and 12 votes "yes." Many congregations might look at that vote and see it as a defeat. They might say, "Oh dear, it looks like no one is interested, let's not do it." That is not the proper response. Instead the leadership needs to say, "Twelve people want to get together and study the book of Luke. Wonderful!" Focus on the good that is present, don't be intimidated by the real or potential negatives.

This strategy does work. When a church, for example, begins to spend a lot of time exploring what is right, what is wrong often pales into insignificance. When people become aware, often for the first time, of what they have in common, they become less threatening to one another. They become less afraid and more eager to work together for the common good. When people celebrate because of what they have done, they are less troubled by what remains to be done.

In one church there were clearly two poles. At one extreme was a group interested almost exclusively in evangelism, the saving of souls. At the other extreme was a group interested almost exclusively in helping people, in social action. These two groups were often distrustful of each other's faith. However they were both concerned with families. They joined together in sponsoring a film series and in facilitating a small group focused on marriages. The next time some people began to complain about the fact that the church could not seem to work together, people from both groups were quick to remind them of this successful joint venture. The church began to focus on the positive rather than the negative and the church's self-image improved overnight.

Build an atmosphere of trust, work on developing a sense of enthusiasm, and don't force people to make potentially divisive choices. These are just a few of the ways a church can help create a setting in which diversity can not only exist, but flourish.

Strategy Eight: Develop a Sense of Ownership

If diversity is going to be creative in a congregation, the people in
that congregation must have a strong sense of ownership of the
church and its ministry. This sense of ownership can be nurtured in
many ways. Certainly the most effective tool for developing a sense
of ownership is participation.

The people can participate, for example, in the decision-making
process. A congregation can be offered a "vote" on given issues.
The participation of a congregation in the process of setting goals is
one possibility. Some care must be taken with this tactic, however,
or it can be abused. To begin with, it is very difficult to gain con-
sensus on anything with a large group. Too many participants in the
decision-making process may well lead to immobility. A second
danger is that a large, solid majority might use its power to domi-
nate the rest of the church. Such a strategy can backfire and be
used to remove others from the fellowship. However, broad partici-
pation can be useful in helping the leadership understand what the
people are feeling, dreaming and needing. A possible adaptation of
this strategy would be the use of the congregation in the informa-
tion-gathering process, but not the actual decision-making process.
How often this idea is used might also depend on the size of the
church, with smaller churches using it far more frequently, and
larger churches using it on rare occasions, if at all.

The strategy of involving a broad base in the decision-making
process can be used very effectively on a leadership level. Commit-
tees, for example, can consult one another before they make major
decisions. The worship committee could confer with the Christian
education committee before it changed an element in worship; the
stewardship committee could discuss with the worship committee
and the Christian education committee its idea for a major fundrais-
ing drive. In this way everyone knows what is happening, more
people get opportunities to offer ideas and suggestions, support is
developed, possible areas of conflict are revealed, and the possibil-
ity of strife diminishes.

There can also be broad participation in various events. Involv-
ing people in the performance of ministry will do wonders for their
sense of ownership. In a small city church the minutes for mission
had always been given by members of the Stewardship and Mission
Committee. However, mission-giving had been lagging and most
people had complained that they simply did not feel excited about
the mission projects the church had adopted. So the leadership de-
cided to use various members of the congregation in the process of
mission interpretation. One family had a long history of involve-

ment in a local ministry to street people, called Union Gospel Mission. That family was asked to present that mission to the congregation. The simple act of giving that report made that family feel better about the church, and their presentation, given with intense feeling, gave the congregation a stronger sense of ownership of that particular mission.

I have found that short-term task forces are a wonderful way to get people involved. Recently in my own church a task force was established to put together a series of special Advent services. Not only did they feel good about their ability to help the church, but the people in the church experienced some worship services designed by people from the church, and found them to be profoundly moving. In the church I serve we also use a special task force to put together the stewardship campaign. Not only do more people get a chance to serve (and the beauty of these kinds of groups is that they are short-term) but these fresh faces often come up with fresh ideas. Quite often old events are revitalized by this newness.

A strategy of broad participation in leadership is easy to implement in Presbyterian churches due to the Presbyterian form of government. The church is led by elders, lay people elected from the congregation, and served by deacons, also elected by the congregation. These two groups allow a wide number of possibilities for service. My current congregation recently expanded its board of Deacons (the front-line caregivers) from nine to 24. This provides more caring, and more participation. Also the Presbyterian system allows for a large number of committees (some would say too many). But these groups can also provide wonderful opportunities for involvement. Whatever the structure of your church, create opportunities for people to get involved in leadership.

It is clear that participation is very important. So is representation. This means that the choice of those people who will be in leadership and who will be involved in the ministry of the church should be made with an eye to broad representation. When a committee, or a task force is put together for any reason, care should be taken to ensure that all the various groups within the church are represented. A committee charged with the task of developing an outreach program would need to include people from every age group in the church; it would need advocates from the various theological parties (a charismatic, a conservative, and a liberal); it would need women as well as men.

Even a work party can benefit from the principle of representation. I gathered a group of people together to repaint some of the rooms in the church and do other necessary repairs. Not included

in the effort were the older people of the church. It took months to repair the damage to the church's unity that resulted from that oversight. In the group of older people who were excluded because they seemed too frail for the arduous tasks at hand were people who, many years earlier, had built the church building. In their minds it was their building. They had a strong sense of ownership of it, since it was the product of their labor. When the building was changed without their permission or help they exploded. It turned out that they really did not mind the changes which were made, they simply needed to feel as if they still had some control over the building they had built.

Summary

It is very important for church leaders to help draw the people of the church together in a working unity. They can do that by helping the people reach a true sense of appreciation of one another's views, priorities, and talents, by creating a warm and friendly space where strangers can meet as friends, by encouraging people to get involved in the ministry of the church, and by developing a system where people of differing priorities and beliefs come to depend upon one another.

CHAPTER VI

A *Potpourri of Practical Concerns*

Martin Marty, in the newsletter *Context*, listed some of the more crucial laws which govern our universe:

> If you file it, you'll never need it. If you need it, you never file it. (Michael Berla)

> History does not repeat itself, historians simply repeat each other. (Otto Bettman)

> Your house only makes strange noises when you are alone. (Denise Dykema)

> When you have a lot of things to do, get your nap out of the way first. (Jeremiah Hynes)[1]

I have my own special rule. It goes like this. "The more basic and critical a strategy, the more likely a church is to ignore it." It amazes me how churches seem able to ignore the simplest and most basic of strategies. These are things every church should do, naturally. But they don't. I would like to review a few tactics I believe must be employed by any church that would deal creatively with diversity.

Strategy Nine: Develop Communication

Clearly communication is an important tool in the task of making diversity creative. The importance of communication becomes obvious if we think in terms of relationships. The church is relational in nature. It involves relationships between individuals and God, between individuals and the group as a whole, and between individuals and other individuals. It takes a great deal of work to maintain all of these relationships, and the key to that effort is communication.

The critical role of communication in relationships has been proved over and over again. Rainer Maria Rilke once wrote "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other." Interaction, physical, emotional, spiritual and mental is a prerequisite of intimacy, and such interaction necessitates adequate intercourse. We must both disclose ourselves and allow others to disclose themselves to us. We must both talk and listen. We desperately need to be involved in the process of dialogue. As Paul Tournier notes in his book *To Understand Each Other*, "No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life without feeling understood by at least one person. . .No one comes to know himself through introspection, or in the solitude of his personal diary. Rather it is in dialogue, in his meeting with other persons."[2]

It is imperative then that the church be intentional about the process of communication. Effective interaction should be sought at all times, and in all situations, and every conceivable topic should provide an opportunity for dialogue. It is safe to assume that such interaction will not happen, at least in the necessary degree, without some effort. Somehow the church must help facilitate it. The question is, how? Certainly the issue can be approached from a number of angles. On the one hand the church can work to establish a specific medium for the express purpose of interchange and dialogue. An excellent example of this kind of medium is the small group, where the expression of ideas and feelings occurs naturally and effectively. A church might well be able to use the small group as a basic element in its effort to encourage dialogue. A large number of small groups can provide a large number of places where people can gather together and talk. The more groups present in a given church, the better. Any group has the potential to help in the process of dialogue. An adult study class, the choir, even the church board can be a forum where creative interchange takes place. This use of small groups for congregational communication might also be more intentional. A church can establish groups whose sole pur-

pose it is to talk about issues critical to the church and its people. Whenever the leadership of the church determines that a topic needs "airing," a forum could be established so that the issue might be dealt with openly.

This concept might well be taken a step further. A permanent forum or small group might be established which would exist expressly for the purpose of dealing with complaints, controversies, and the needs for dialogue. The advantages of such a forum or small group are obvious. First, such a group would offer the people a designated place to air their feelings. This is crucial in that the repression of such feelings is more dangerous than the expression, in most cases. Second, if the group were effective, it would offer a model for the resolution of conflict. As the people watched this group resolve the conflicts that arose in the church, they would learn the necessary skills for resolving conflicts on their own. If the group is to be a model it should of course use a clear and effective process of conflict resolution. A suggested process might be as follows:

1. Establishing Communication (Listening)
2. Collaborating (Sorting and Planning)
3. Resolution (Acting)

In some cases the establishment of such a group might not be necessary because of the presence of an existing group which already fills this role. In my first church a standing committee of the church board became the conflict resolution forum for the congregation. Not only was the committee charged with the task of increasing the sense of community within the church, but it was also made up of exceptionally caring people. As a result the congregation soon found itself going to this group with its various struggles and frustrations. The group members would listen with concern and caring and generally defuse the situations presented. If people were frustrated with me the group would share their feelings with me and suggest, at times, that I call upon those people or families, and work with me to improve my skills and strategies. If there were hurt feelings people were encouraged to share the hurt with those responsible. Sometimes situations and actions were explained and the hurt healed. At other times the group would suggest various courses of action in order to move toward resolution.

The small group or conflict forum is not the only way to facilitate communication. There is also the written word. It is very important that churches attempt to communicate with their members by the use of various printed materials. Much can be shared and many problems defused by the use of such media as the church

newsletter. One church was in the process of considering some new hymnals. This, of course, was a potentially explosive issue for a number of reasons. There were the normal pastoral concerns in that the current hymnals had been donated by current members in memory of loved ones. There were also some other potentially divisive issues. The hymnals in use were clearly oriented toward one end of the theological spectrum (the liberal). Conspicuous by their absence were many of the traditional hymns so popular with people from conservative churches. If the issue had not been handled well, a great deal of dissatisfaction might have resulted. However, the church used the newsletter to share with the congregation its reasons for considering a change. The people were reminded of the variety of denominational backgrounds present in the congregation and were told that the current effort to obtain new hymnals was an effort to offer all the people of the church music with which they could identify. In the end the change of hymnals was effected smoothly.

Also important are visual displays. In a city church the committee responsible for mission interpretation used a bulletin board on which it displayed various mission projects. These displays were purposefully rotated by the committee to portray the entire scope of missions. In this way the congregation learned about missions worldwide, regionally and locally. They were exposed to missions which tackled social problems as well as those which dealt with spiritual problems. One month the denomination's ministry to regional Indian groups was presented; the next, the training of pastors from Third World countries was pictured; and the next, a conservative local ministry to street people. As a result of this bulletin board all kinds of people saw the broad variety of missions supported by the church. This communication kept people from feeling that their particular mission concerns were being neglected and it helped them understand the validity of other concerns.

The spoken word was also important. An example of spoken communication is the "minute for mission" presentation given by many churches during worship services each Sunday. During this time the people are told about the actions of the local church and those of the denomination. In some churches they are actually given a chance to ask questions and enter into dialogue with the presenter.

Public communication is not the only kind of communication necessary. More personal kinds of interchange must also take place. People in the church talk to other people in the church about very

crucial things. Without genuine communication polarity becomes a reality. To enable effective listening and sharing to take place it is important for the church to offer individuals the chance to learn communication skills. This can be done a number of ways. One of the best tools available is the L.E.A.D. Lab I developed by John Savage of L.E.A.D. Associates. This helpful workshop was originally designed to help churches respond to inactive members. Its goal is to teach church people to see the hurts, and through listening, conflict resolution, and role renegotiation, to reinvolve people in the church. This is certainly not the only such workshop available, and often local resources can offer excellent training opportunities. Ongoing training can also be extremely helpful. Listening skills can be taught on a regular basis to church boards and to those entrusted with various caregiving activities. It is important at this point not to underestimate the power of the pulpit. Even through the average Sunday sermon people can be taught how to care and how to listen. Once people have been taught, they can become extremely helpful in the ministry of the church. These people can build bridges between people, and between people and the church.

Communication. Neglect it and the relationships which make your church a church will disintegrate and falter. Help make interaction happen!

Strategy Ten: Recognize the Critical Role of Leadership

There are many factors which help a church maintain a healthy environment in spite of the presence of diversity, but no factor is more important than leadership. The simple fact is that if a church would be a vital and growing place its leaders must lead.

Leadership is important first in planning. There is an old saying which says "If you aim at nothing, you hit it every time." That is especially true in a volunteer organization such as the church. If a church does not plan its responses to such factors as diversity, then nothing will happen. Nothing which was planned, that is. What does happen is that instead of responding to the pressure pluralism brings, the church simply reacts, without thought, and often with tragic consequences. But with proper awareness, proper planning, and appropriate responses churches can often turn plurality into an advantage.

Faith Church was headed toward trouble. The church was made up of two very distinct elements: an older cadre which had lived in the small rural community for many years, and a large group of younger people, all relatively new to the town and the church. These groups were constantly finding each other on opposite sides of the issues. They could not agree on the order of worship, or on the format for the adult Sunday School class. When it came to priorities for the minister, they disagreed yet again. But Faith Church was lucky. It had a minister who was aware of the problem, and was willing to be a leader. Instead of ignoring the situation he acknowledged it and sat down with the church board in an effort to formulate some strategies. Worship being one of the major problems, the group sought to develop some strategy to help defuse the tension. They did not feel it possible to change the basic order of worship. That would be to violate too many years of tradition. Instead they decided to begin by working with one specific element in the worship service, the special music. In response to the variety of tastes in music they decided to develop two music groups which could provide, alternately, special music for worship. One group was a men's quartet which sang traditional gospel arrangements. The other group was a small choir which used guitars for accompaniment and sang various contemporary songs. The strategy was clear: to offer both groups music with which they could identify. In fact this attempt did not turn out quite the way the leaders had envisioned it. In the end both parties in the church decided they liked both music groups. The gap began to narrow.

At First Church there had been tremendous growth over a period of four years. As a result there was a clear division between those people who had been a part of the original, well established congregation and those who had been a part of the recent influx of members. There were many points of division between these two groups, but the most obvious point of conflict involved the role of the pastor. The members who had been part of the church before the growth spurt had some well established ideas about how the pastor should spend her time. The newer members, many of whom had come from much larger congregations in much larger communities, had a much different view of pastoral priorities. It became clear to the pastor and the church board that problems would soon arrive if something wasn't done, and quickly. As a result the board, which was made up of people from both parties, spent an entire weekend developing a list of pastoral activities, and then prioritizing those activities. At the end of the weekend they had agreed on the order of priority and then presented their list to the

congregation at large. People from both groups were a part of the presenting team, and each decision was explained in detail. Although some tensions remained, the situation was defused and people were much more comfortable with the pastor's efforts.

Leaders must be aware of potential problems, and in response they must work with other leaders to plan and carry out appropriate strategies.

Leaders are also important as they actively lead the people of the church in the process of working with the issues which face them. Pastors can facilitate effective dialogue, or they can sabotage it. When leaders either "knock heads" by being combative or "avoid" by denying the existence of the tension, they become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. When they practice conflict management they can become a critical component in the process of resolution. This list suggests some possible principles:

1. The leaders should summarize and articulate the objective differences of opinion.
2. The leaders should enable both sides to be heard.
3. The leaders should promote true dialogue.
4. The leaders should set group rules (such as, for every negative comment one makes, one must also make two positive statements about the other's idea).
5. The leaders should make sure that all the facts are presented.
6. The leaders should help the opponents arrive at a decision.
7. The leaders should help the participants debrief the process after the effort is concluded.

Leaders should lead the church in its efforts to explore the issues. They should provide positive, balanced direction.

The attitude of the leader is critical. If the leaders are convinced that the problem can be solved, then it probably will be. If they are convinced that the problem is hopeless, then resolution will probably not occur. Leaders can literally offer "self-fulfilling" prophecies. What they believe and communicate is often what will happen.

Leaders can not only affect the outcome of specific problems by their attitudes, but they can also shape the attitude of the church. If the leaders say that the diversity of the church is exciting, the people will agree. If the leadership says that the diversity present is a problem, the people will agree. The leaders can set the tone for the entire church, and thus provide a solid foundation for management.

Not only can the efforts of the leadership be important, but also the composition of that leadership. It is necessary to have a relatively representative leadership team. This representation can occur

on a number of levels. It can occur on the pastoral level. Many churches have realized that in order to minister effectively to the diverse people in their churches they need to have diverse staffs. If a church has two major groupings in its membership and is large enough to have two ministers, there should be a minister for each group. If the church is audio and kinesthetic for example, one minister should be an audio, the other a kinesthetic.

The church board should reflect a similar diversity. In the small rural church where I began my ministry we took this need seriously. We had a diverse group and so had a diverse church board. There were both men and women (7 men and 5 women); a spread in age groups (the oldest was 85 and the youngest was 16); a wide range of theological stances, different educational levels (there was a Ph.D. and a person who had not finished grade school); a plurality of lifestyle (there were farmers who had lived their entire lives in that small town, a lawyer who lived in a large city 20 miles away, an architect, some housewives, and more); and a wide range of incomes. It must be admitted that this composition sometimes made it difficult to make decisions or develop consensus, but it was effective in establishing a decision-making process which was sensitive to the diversity of the church.

The role leadership might play in the effort to deal with diversity is profound. The possibilities are almost endless. Let it simply be said that leaders have a tremendous responsibility to help the church wander through the wilderness of potential polarities. Leaders must lead.

Strategy Eleven: Develop Programs on the Basis of Need

Why does your church offer its current programs? Why does your church do what it does the way it does it? In many cases the answer will be, "Because that is what churches do, and that is what we have always done!" Often the factors dictating the kinds of programs developed and implemented in a church are tradition and the interest of the pastor(s). The same is true of the way churches perform their tasks (Remember, the seven last words of the church are "We've never done it that way before.") Yet if the task of the church is, in the name and power of the risen Christ, to meet the needs of the diverse people who come into contact with it, then the primary fac-

tor which must be taken into account is need. The primary question any church should ask as it decides what ministries to develop and as it chooses how it performs those ministries is "What do the people need?"

What do the people need? What do they need from the sermons? What do they need from the worship experience? What do they need from Christian education?

Obviously if any of these questions is going to be answered the church must spend some time learning about the people it serves. It must learn where those people hurt. Are their major problems economic or relational? It must learn which people are being ignored by other services. Is there a large singles community that remains unsupported? Are there people who are going through the process of grief without support? Is there a significant group of people who are having trouble dealing with elderly parents? The church must have a clear understanding of the people it serves and the community in which it is placed.

How is this information gathered? There are a number of ways to put such information together. Local agencies can often offer the local church a great deal of information. Chamber of Commerce offices, as well as various county, state and federal agencies, can be gold mines of information. Churches can carry out their own surveys. One church took a questionnaire to all the homes in its immediate vicinity in an attempt to discover who lived in the proximity of the church. Church members themselves can be polled in order to discover important concerns. And of course the church leadership can simply listen. They can take the time to listen to people as they share their hopes, dreams, and hurts. Even the fellowship time after church can be an important information gathering tool.

Once the information is gathered then the church needs to act upon the new understanding it has gained. This will normally mean that the church will find itself deleting some of its traditional programs which no longer meet any perceived needs, and adding other programs to meet new and pressing needs. This radical revamping of programs is not easy for churches to do, since the church has tended to be tied to tradition and the sustainers of the status quo. Yet it must be done or the church will find itself out of touch with the world and incapable of meeting the needs of its members.

In this case the church is limited only by its ingenuity and its willingness to risk. But let's start small. The church can begin to meet needs simply by addressing the needs of the congregation

through the sermons. It is very important that pastors respond to the congregations they serve by being relevant in their preaching. It does no good to answer questions no one is asking, to fight battles no one is fighting, or to deal with concerns that are basically unimportant to the members of the church. In my first congregation I made a conscious effort to speak to the real needs of the people in the pews. One way I did this was by maintaining a balance between various kinds of emphases throughout the course of the church year. In the fall the sermons were focused on the basics of the faith. There were a number of reasons for doing this. First, by covering the basics regularly I was able to present the core beliefs of the church for all to hear and examine. Many members needed this kind of review. Second, those from conservative backgrounds who expected to hear what they considered "evangelical" sermons had their needs at least partially satisfied. Third, those who had never heard the Gospel before had a clear opportunity to respond.

One fall it was perceived that a large number of people were struggling with a need to explore the whole concept of discipleship. They were struggling with what it means to be a Christian in today's world. To respond to that need it was decided to do a series on "Servanthood" (which is not quite the same as discipleship, but is close). The purpose was to highlight the individual's need for a relationship with God and to emphasize the impact of that relationship upon a person's lifestyle. The flow of the series went as follows:

1. Call to Discipleship—Matthew 25
2. The Jesus Style—Isaiah 53, Philippians 2:5-11
3. Foundations—Isaiah 40
4. Frustration—Isaiah 1
5. Moving On—Philippians 3:7-14
6. We Have Charisma—Isaiah 42:1-9
7. Portrait of a Servant I—Matthew 5:1-6
8. Portrait of a Servant II—Matthew 5:7-11
9. The Grace of Giving—Isaiah 42
10. A New Symbol—John 13:1-17
11. Yes, We Can!—Isaiah 42:5-7

In the spring a series was developed dealing with the Christian lifestyle taken from the Journey of Christ to Jerusalem in Luke (Luke 9:51-21:38). The emphasis during this series was on the ethical implications of the gospel and was aimed at stimulating those who had

a real desire to put their faith to work. It continued the exploration begun in the fall by exploring the topic of servanthood in a more detailed way.

The worship style of the congregation can also be used to respond to people's needs. One need that many people feel, for example, is a need for the personal. For many the world is becoming increasingly impersonal and they desperately want to experience the "personal touch." One church, realizing this need, radically changed its style of worship. They moved from a formal style service to a casual service. They allowed and even encouraged casual dress, including blue jeans and cutoffs. One family, in winter, would regularly show up dressed in cross country ski outfits, complete with skis! The minister wandered up and down the aisles of the church, the choir sat in the midst of the congregation rather than in a special place. Often, during the process of the service, the minister and the congregation would participate in dialogue. To offer added personal attention to individuals the minister, instead of staying in his study before the service, would greet people as they entered the church. He made a special effort to learn visitors' names and, with their permission, introduced them to the congregation at the beginning of worship.

In some churches special elements are added to rather traditional services. Trinity Church felt that people had a real need to respond to the message of the Gospel as it was presented in the service. They developed a number of media for allowing that response, including a time after the service for people to come forward and talk to church officers about needs, or faith, and a time for people to enter into a dialogue with the minister about the sermon. Grace Church was disturbed by the number of young families whose children did not want to attend worship. They spent a lot of time developing elements within the worship service especially for children. These efforts went far beyond the "children's sermon" and included special times for the children to enter into dialogue with the pastor, special songs, and other such activities.

For many churches special classes or groups have been used to help meet critical needs. These classes can be used either on Sunday morning or at some other time. First Church, a congregation of about 350 members in a moderate-sized community, saw that a number of its families were struggling. It responded by offering a Sunday morning adult class which focused on the family. This same church contained a number of families in which the aging of par-

ents was becoming a problem for their children, due to failing health, memories, and resources. A Sunday evening "forum" or workshop was held during which various experts from the community were able to offer information and advice. Participants were also able to share experiences, frustrations and successes.

Yet another church had a large number of people in its midst who had experienced a critical loss during the last year. Some of these losses were due to death, others to divorce. The church developed a support group for these people. They gathered together each week to pray, to share, and to study the process of grief. In a small rural community a church helped the community's senior citizens develop a seniors' program. After the group was well established, the church, while continuing to allow them the use of the building, let them become an autonomous group. Soon the community had a long needed seniors' program which continued to expand and meet the needs of all the community's elderly. Such groups as these can vary in size, nature, and in duration, but they are incredibly important in a church's attempt to meet the critical needs of people.

A church can meet needs through its giving. Many churches find important causes to support financially. A church can meet needs by offering services, such as food banks or clothes closets. A group of churches, seeing that the local "Meals on Wheels" program was not meeting the total needs of many elderly people, developed a group called "Saint Martha's Kitchen" and took many older people home-baked bread and soup three evenings a week.

Even the simple task of scheduling can be influenced by need. Churches with a large number of children need to be aware of what time they offer their programs. Churches with a large number of elderly people must be aware of the needs of this group in terms of meeting times. A group that is designed to help meet the needs of older persons should not, for example, be held at night, for many older people are afraid to drive or walk at night.

Discovering the needs of the people and developing programs to meet those needs are extremely important in the process of managing diversity. If taken seriously these actions can make a tremendous difference in the effectiveness of a church's attempts to minister to unique people.

Strategy Twelve: Establish Clear Expectations

Every church has certain expectations of its members. Some, known as "low demand" or "voluntary" churches, have few expectations.

Others, known as "high demand" churches, have many expecta-
tions. But all churches have a certain set of expectations. If those
expectations are well defined and communicated clearly to both
members and potential members, the church in question has taken
a big step in the management of diversity.

Expectations are part of the ground work which is necessary if
any long-term relationship is going to be productive and healthy. A
role renegotiation model created by Dr. John J. Sherwood is ex-
tremely valuable in helping us understand the importance of devel-
oping clear expectations. This model looks like this:[3]
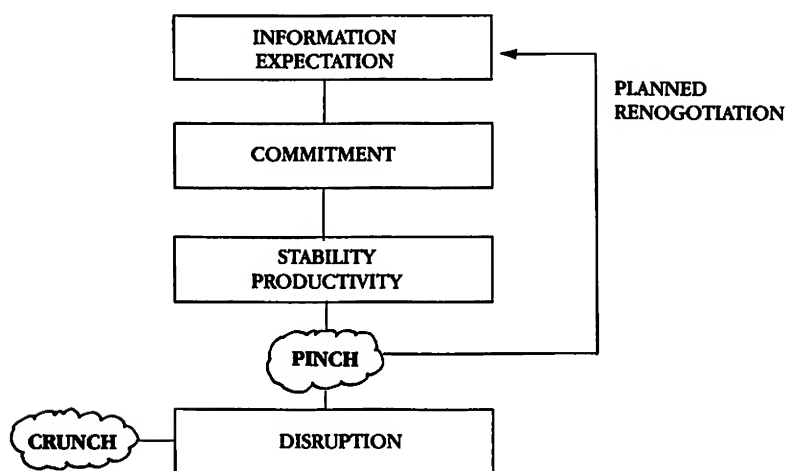
This model charts the predictable stages of long term relationships
(and what is a member's relationship with a church but a long term
relationship?) Notice that the first stage, which might be called the
"courtship stage" involves two critical elements, information and ex-
pectation. This stage is a time for asking questions. For gathering all
the information possible. If we are talking about the relationship of
an individual with a church, many questions might be asked. The
individual might ask these questions of the church: How do you
view the Bible? What kind of worship style do you pursue? What

kinds of programs can you offer my children? What kind of groups can you offer me? Are there people in this church with whom I might be friends? The church, on the other hand, will have its own questions to ask: What do you believe? Are you willing to give to the work of the church? What talents do you have? What is your vision for the church? These questions are very important, for on the basis of the information gathered the parties involved then go through the process of developing expectations. The member says to the church, "I expect certain things from you." And the church says to the member, "I expect certain things of you." These expectations form the foundation upon which the relationship exists. They are the rules according to which the relationship functions. Only when these first two tasks have been carried out can the relationship move forward effectively.

From stage one the relationship then moves to stage two, the act of commitment. At this point the two parties, knowing each other and having developed certain sets of expectations, make a commitment to one another. The church says to the person, "I will serve you." The individual says to the church, "I will become a member, and I will do what I have promised." In this time the two parties make a formal commitment; they "get married." It might be noted that there are various levels of commitment possible at this point ranging from casual to deep. The depth of commitment is clearly related to the kinds of expectations which have been developed. Unclear expectations produce shallow commitment.

After the commitment stage the parties begin the process of trying to live together. At the beginning they experience what is called the stability and productivity stage, otherwise known as the "honeymoon." At this point in the relationship both parties are happy. What they expected to receive they are receiving, what they expected to give they are giving. The new member, for example, still thinks the minister is the best preacher he has ever heard, is still enthralled by the music and inspired by the banners. The church is pleased, for the member is present at almost every service, is giving generously, and is thinking about becoming a Sunday School teacher. This is a calm and wonderful stage. Can it last? Of course not!

This stage cannot last for it is normal that it not do so. Why? Partly because things change—people change, the church changes, and situations change. But probably the main reason the productivity/stability stage does not last is because the information gathered and expectations developed way back at the beginning of the process were not adequate. It is, of course, impossible at the beginning

of a relationship to know all the information necessary and set expectations which cover every possible situation. It is impossible to know for sure whether the expectations which are developed are reasonable or possible. There will always be, at some point in the relationship, a time when one of the parties is surprised, when they learn something about the other they did not know, when they learn something which is the opposite of what they thought they knew. One person, for example, joined a church believing Christians did not fight. She soon learned otherwise. And there will always be a time when the expectations of one party are violated.

This violation is called a "pinch." The person "pinched" is hurt, and often angry, and the relationship is no longer as stable and productive as it once was. If the pinch is dealt with and worked out, the relationship can once again reach a stage of productivity and stability. Most of the strategies already examined help in the process of working through this kind of violation. If the violation is not dealt with, all kinds of problems arise and the potential is there for polarization and the eventual disintegration of the relationship.

Can a pinch be avoided? No! It will happen, no matter how carefully the church and the new member develop the relationship. But the amount of difficulty a relationship encounters can be radically lessened if the people and institutions involved do a good job early in the process. If the tasks of gathering information and developing expectations have been done carefully then there is less chance of surprises and violated expectations.

How can a local church go about the process of establishing clear expectations? Obviously the new member's class is a good place to start, and time should be set aside for this effort. In the new member classes in my churches we have traditionally spent less time talking about the history and nature of the denomination and more time talking about the history and nature of the individual congregation. History is important for it often explains why things are the way they are. For the task of giving the history of the church I suggest the pastor use a member of the church who has a long tenure in that congregation. It is helpful if this person is a significant leader in the church. (It is not necessary that this person's role be "official.") This person can lead the new members through the church's history and help it come alive. The task of helping the people understand the church is probably more difficult. In *Looking in the Mirror*, Lyle Schaller offers a number of categories which help classify a church. One category involves the Trinity. Each church tends to focus on one person of the Trinity. They focus on God as Father, as Son, or as Spirit. This focus influences the style of

the church.[4] I explain the various categories and ask the potential
members to place the church somewhere in those categories. Then
a member of the church board shares with the group the placement
chosen by the board. By the end of our time together the new
members have a much clearer picture of where the church has
been, what it is like, and where it might be going.

After this information has been exchanged the group then goes
through a process of sharing expectations. The members are invited
to tell the pastor their expectations and the officers present their
expectations of the church. (Often this information has to be
prompted, since the common initial response is "nothing.") Some-
times it becomes clear that certain expectations are not possible or
reasonable. One potential member once told me that she expected
a visit at least once every other month. I was forced to tell her that
such an expectation could not be fulfilled (the church has around
400 members) and worked with her to develop a new and more
reasonable assumption. The church also takes time to tell the peo-
ple what it expects of them.

This exchange of assumptions has proved critical for a number
of reasons. First, it has tended to keep people who come into the
church from being surprised. They know what they can expect and
they know what is expected of them. They know, for example, that
they are expected to give financial support to the church and to
pledge. They know that we expect participation in worship. There
are fewer hidden agendas. Second it sometimes keeps people who
do not really fit the congregation from joining the church in the
first place. (Remember, you probably can't meet the needs of the
entire spectrum.) Several people, having attended the class, have
said, "I think I'd better keep looking." They knew that we simply
could not meet their expectations, that we were too far away from
the theological center, or too different in style or nature for them to
enjoy a stable and productive relationship. Although it is never en-
joyable to hear people tell you that they don't really find your
church adequate, such an understanding early in the process can
circumvent much pain and strife.

But the new member is not the only person who needs to ex-
amine the church and establish clear expectations. Such an effort is
also a part of the process of dealing with hurts and violated expec-
tations. It is part of what must happen after the "pinch." Indeed the
church and its members must go through this first stage over and
over and over again. So even those who have been in the church
for a long time must take the time to gain information and clarify
their assumptions. As we have noted, times and situations and even

churches *do* change. Misunderstandings occur, and even longtime members can have unrealistic expectations.

There are a number of ways this process can be encouraged. Newsletters can be wonderful media for helping the congregation understand themselves. Don't just report events and share church gossip. Talk seriously in your newsletter about what your church is like and what that means. Use the newsletter to share your church history. Have historical notes, written by longtime members. Everyone will learn something, and those who experienced those events will feel special.

Workshops can also be important tools. Run through your new members' class with your church board. Let them examine the church from new perspectives. Challenge them to come to a clear and objective understanding. That understanding can be the basis for creative and effective planning.

Establish an adult class whose sole purpose is to study the church from a Biblical basis (Ephesians is a great book to use!) Then help that class examine your church on the basis of what they have learned.

The strategy is simple, but the possibilities are endless! Help your church establish clear expectations.

Concluding Notes

Once a young boy wrote a story. He called it "Jesus On His Cross."
It went like this:

> Once upon a time Jesus was born. He was a nice baby, he never
> did cry. He was always happy. I love Jesus and God. Those are
> the ones I promise I believe in. And when Jesus awoke he was
> the most beautiful person in the whole world. But after a couple
> of years he began to think, "I may want to die for their sins and
> I guess I will make that Easter." And boy oh boy were his
> mother and father sad. And they watched them hang up Jesus.
> They both had a tear down their face. Then a few years ago Je-
> sus arose from the dead and everyone was happy.[1]

This was a third grader's reply to the question "What does Easter
mean to you?" It is a reply which should make those of us who lead
the church blush. For in a wonderful, beautiful way this young child
has captured the essence of Christianity. And he has reminded us
why we exist as a church. To share the good news of Jesus, "the
most beautiful person in the world." To share the fact that Jesus
arose from the dead and help make people happy.

If we could always remember the simple wonder of the Gospel
I would not have felt driven to list these strategies. But we don't
remember. Forgetting Christ our center we allow human desires,
needs and differences to separate and divide us. The result? The
wonderful diversity of the Body of Christ becomes a handicap, and
the Body is torn and sundered.

Because we are so human we need to work with our diversity.
We cannot pretend to be spiritual heroes and maintain the illusion
that because we are brothers and sisters in Christ we will get along.

We won't. As one person noted, "The Church is like Noah's ark. The only reason we can stand the stench inside is the storm which rages outside." The Church, like any human organization, is threatened by diversity. We must swallow our ideals and our pride and manage our pluralism consciously and intentionally.

May these strategies help you as you attempt to guide your church into the future. May the diversity in your midst become a wonderful gift, which can help your church grow and become what it is called to be.

ENDNOTES

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1. Neill Hamilton, *Unity Within Creative Diversity*, published by the Advisory Council on Discipleship and Worship, UPCUSA, 1974, p. 1; see also Harold E. Posey, *Discovering and Affirming Theological Pluralism*. San Francisco Theological Seminary, Thesis, 1977, p. 1ff.

2. H. Borchardt and W. Ben Lane, *New Church Development and Church Redevelopment*. A Manual for Presbyterians, UPCUSA, 1980.

3. Hamilton, pp. 18ff.

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2. Bernard Bass, *Leadership, Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960), p. 362.

3. Lee and Galloway, *The Schizophrenic Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 179.

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2. Ibid., p. 10.

3. The Appendix contains the confession developed by the First Presbyterian Church of Reardan, Washington.

4. Advisory Council on Discipleship and Worship, p. 10.

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2. Contact Leadership, Education and Development, P. O. Box 664, Reynoldsburg, OH 43068 (Phone 614-864-0156).

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2. Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Disciple* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1975), p. 61.

3. Lyle Schaller, "Six Responses to Pluralism," *The Parish Paper* (Yokefellow Institute), 5 June, 1976, p. 1.

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2. Paul Tournier, *To Understand Each Other* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1974), pp. 29, 30.

3. John J. Sherwood, as used in the Leadership, Education and Development Lab I.

4. Lyle E. Schaller, *Looking in the Mirror* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), p.73ff.

Concluding Notes

1. This letter was quoted by Donald Griggs of "Griggs Educational Resources" at a workshop in La Grande, OR, Fall, 1986.

APPENDIX

Confessional Statement of the Reardan Presbyterian Church

A "core" statement to help the church discover its center and to aid individuals in their search for their own theological centers.

We believe in one God. We believe that this one God is the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in God the Creator, the one who is a God of history acting in it with justice and in love. We believe that he wants to be a loving parent to us and that he desires that we be his children. We believe that he is a parent who looks in love at what he has created and who in love desires that all be for the good of his children.

We believe in Jesus the Christ, God Incarnate, Son of God, Son of Man. Jesus is the basis of our belief and hope; he is the promise of deliverance from sin and death. Jesus is God visibly seeking to reach us, his children, taking the initiative to come to the world in love. The world is redeemed through this Jesus who even now lives and makes himself present to us, the same Jesus who lived, taught, was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead according to the Scriptures.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the presence of God here and now in our lives. The Spirit is the spiritual birthright of every Christian and enters believers when they trust in Jesus. The Spirit guarantees the participation of believers in the living Christ, which gives new life to those who believe, and which makes them new creations. It is the Spirit as the helper, comforter, and guide who imparts to believers the power to be God's children.

We believe in the Church, the community of God. We believe that the Church is a creation of God, established and maintained through the Holy Spirit. It is the body of Christ, the fellowship of faith, the people of God, and the community of the Spirit. The Church has an inner focus where it is concerned with the relationship of individual members with God and with other believers. But

it also has a focus which looks outward. It is called to step outside of itself; to penetrate the world; to participate in mission. It is to break down walls and reach out to the world in love, bearing the good news, being a reconciling force in people's relationships with God, relationships with others, and in their relationships to themselves. Each Christian is a member of the church and has been given a particular gift to use as a part of God's movement through his people. The movement of God often meets new needs and situations and so the church must be a dynamic structure, alive, flexible, and in motion, seeking to change the way things are.

We believe in the Scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments as the unique and authoritative witness to God and his activity. We believe that the Scriptures were written through the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit. As they were written in the Spirit they must be read in the Spirit, for God works not only in the writing but also in the reading. If they are read in the Spirit they are completely effective in communicating to the reader what God intends. They are the primary guide for belief and action. Other writings must be read and judged in the light of Scripture.

We believe in the sacrament of baptism as set aside by Christ for the use of the church. Baptism is a decisive event in the life of the Christian, for through it the person is admitted into the Christian community. It is a time of cleansing from sin and reception of God's presence.

We believe in the Lord's Supper as established by Jesus. In the Lord's Supper, Christ is present in the midst of the family in a very real way, drawing the believers to him and to each other. The meal symbolizes Christ's action on the cross, and his sacrifice for each of us.

We believe that God has come in Christ. We believe that Christ's work affects all of our existence—our relationships; our actions; our values; our awareness of who we are. The fact that God has acted makes a difference and that difference should be seen. God has loved us and so we are to live lives of love. As those in relationship with God and as those being made whole by God, we are to put our faith into action in the world in love and service, furthering God's kingdom, furthering justice, furthering equality and self-development.

We believe that what we have now is only a partial fulfillment of God's promise. We must still struggle and live in the world. We will still fail and fall short of God's purpose all too often. But we believe we can look past what is now toward the final triumph of God, toward the coming of Christ and the fullness of the kindgdom of God!

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